BENEDICT SPINOZA

# THEOLOGICO-POLITICAL TREATISE

*containing*
*some Dissertations*
*by which it is shown not only that the Freedom of Philosophizing can be Granted in keeping with Piety and the Peace of the Republic, but that it cannot be Removed unless along with that very Piety and the Peace of the Republic*

*Through this, we know that we remain in God and God remains in us:*
*that he has given us of his Spirit.*
*—I John 4:13*

Translated from the Latin with Glossary, Indexes and Interpretive Essay

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# *TRANSLATOR'S REMARKS*

The following translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670)—the philosophical founding-document of both modern biblical criticism and modern liberal democracy—aims at the utmost literalness and consistency of terms which my own moderate ability and a proper and intelligible English allow. It is based on the Latin text found in Benedictus Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt (4 vols.; Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1925), III, 3-267, as corrected where necessary by Fokke Akkerman in Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus / Traité théologico-politique*, ed. F. Akkerman, trans. J. Lagrée and P.-F. Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999). Boldface numbers enclosed in curly brackets indicate the corresponding pages in Gebhardt's edition; numbers enclosed in square brackets indicate the section numbers superimposed onto the text of the *Treatise* by C.H. Bruder in *Benedicti de Spinoza Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Bruder (3 vols.; Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, Jr., 1843-46), III, 1-271.

Spinoza's text consists of a Preface and twenty chapters, including occasional footnotes by Spinoza, plus thirty-nine Annotations added by Spinoza to the margins of his manuscript of the *Treatise* after its first publication and appended by subsequent editors. I have surrounded with quotation marks each of Spinoza's footnotes, along with footnote references to the Annotations, and placed them among my own translator's footnotes at the bottom of each page. Gebhardt has supplemented the Latin text of the Annotations with interpolations drawn from early Dutch and French translations; I have instead followed the text established by Akkerman, which drops most of the interpolations and surrounds the remaining ones with angular brackets. I have also consulted Akkerman's footnotes freely for the purpose of confirming or supplementing my translator's footnotes concerning Spinoza's literary sources, etc.

Spinoza's numerous Hebrew and Aramaic quotations have been retained in their original fonts, as have the three Greek words found in Annotation 26. That same Annotation contains in addition four Syriac expressions; although Spinoza himself also transliterates them, I have retained their original fonts as well.

Here and there I have altered Spinoza's occasional transliteration of Hebrew words, to fit the ear of the modern Hebrew-speaker.

Citations to classical Greek and Latin authors are to the Loeb Classical Library editions of their works. Unless otherwise indicated, citations to rabbinic commentators other than Maimonides are to *Mikraot Gedolot* (10 vols.; New York: Pardes, 1951).

Interpolations of my own, consisting of an English word or two added or repeated so as to convey the drift of Spinoza's Latin, are occasionally indicated by a small circle immediately following the inserted expression—thus°.

Spinoza's Latin is fairly straightforward in its sentence structure, but often subtle in its word choices. Throughout his argument, he imputes new meanings to old words or, what amounts to the same thing, relies on the double meanings of

those words to convey his gist. On the one hand, then, his *Treatise* is like a routine political pamphlet in that he limits himself by and large to oldfashioned theological and political terms whose meanings are familiar to his intended reader from routine usage. On the other hand, it is like an academic textbook in that during the course of his argument Spinoza endows many of those terms with newfangled meanings —sometimes explicitly (e.g., "prophet," "law"), sometimes only implicitly (e.g., "worship," "imperium")—so as to support his innovative conclusions. That Spinoza invites his reader to connect the oldfashioned and newfangled meanings of important theological and political terms is another way of describing his argument as a whole. Often a single English equivalent will serve to translate Spinoza's Latin puns (if that is the right word for them), but often not. Whenever I have been forced to choose which lexical meaning to bring to the surface and which to leave submerged—in the hope that it will somehow survive and reemerge in the larger flow of the argument—I have usually preferred an English equivalent that keeps to the *Treatise*'s rhetorical flow, albeit at the risk of departing from its conceptual precision. Where appropriate, I have tried to indicate that risk by a footnote that supplies an alternate translation or else refers the reader to the Glossary, or both. Occasionally, too, I have used a footnote to indicate where in keeping with the rhetorical flow I have had to sacrifice the literal meaning of a Latin term, or where in keeping with the literal meaning I have had to sacrifice the rhetorical flow by translating in a way that at first glance might appear jarring to the English reader.

I have also retained Spinoza's habit, preserved by Gebhardt in his edition of the Latin text, of frequently capitalizing common nouns for emphasis.

To indicate further what I have seen in Spinoza's Latin which has led me to try to preserve the consistency of important terms wherever possible, I have added an Interpretive Essay and, alongside Indexes of Citations and Names, an extensive Index of Terms.

Finally, Spinoza's Latin is characterized by paragraphs and sentences of often considerable length. To ease the burden on the English reader and to facilitate references to Spinoza's text, I have numbered each Latin paragraph, as well as each Latin sentence within that paragraph. I have then treated each numbered sentence as a separate paragraph and punctuated Spinoza's Latin half-stops as English full-stops. As a result, the third Latin sentence of the second paragraph of Spinoza's first chapter, say, is 1.2.3. An "A" instead of a Chapter-number in the citation refers to Spinoza's Annotations, a "P" to his Preface, a "T" to a Chapter-title, and "TP" to the Title Page. To help the reader's eye while scanning the Indexes, I have placed all Chapter-numbers (and the aforementioned letters) there in boldface.

# *ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

I am grateful to friends, not all of whom happen to be professional academics, for prodding me to undertake this project and offering help and advice when these were sorely needed. I have benefited throughout from the gentle coaxing and nurturing comments of Joe Cohen, as well as from his vetting an early draft of the translation at St. John's College, Annapolis. Others to whom thanks are owed, in ways too varied and numerous to list briefly, are Eve Adler, Jacob Adler, Paul Bagley, Laurence Berns, Jean-Pierre Delange, Doug Den Uyl, Dan Elazar *z"l*, Louis Feldman, Ken Green, George Greene, Reid Heller, Bob Hodgson, Becky Hughes, Irene Klaver, Tom Pangle, Josh Parens, Marty Plax, Heidi Ravven, Ellis Rivkin, Bob Sacks, Richard Taylor, Alan Udoff, Peter Vedder, Stuart Warner, and especially Keith Whitaker. Special thanks to students who have graciously acceded to a teacher's request and offered assistance: Daniel Cundiff, Gabriel Guerrero, Yoshi Kato, and especially Matt Hansbauer.

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M.D.Y.

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# PREFACE

¶1 {5}If human beings could regulate all their affairs[1] with certain[2] counsel,[3] or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would not be bound[4] by any superstition.

2 But since they are often reduced to such straits that they are unable to apply any counsel and—in view of the uncertain goods of fortune, which they long for without measure[5]—often vacillate miserably between hope and dread, they therefore have a psyche[6] very prone to believing anything whatever. While it is in doubt, it is easily[7] driven back and forth—and much more easily while it stays agitated by hope and dread; at other times°[8] it is overtrusting, boastful and proud.

3 [2] Yet I figure no one is ignorant of these things, though I believe that most are ignorant of themselves. For no one has lived among human beings who does not see that, in favorable situations, most of them are so overflowing with wisdom that even if they are very inexperienced they believe a wrong is done to them if someone wants to give them counsel. In adverse ones, however, they do not know[9] where to turn, and seek counsel on bended knees from anyone; and nothing they hear is so idiotic, so absurd or vain, that they do not follow it. Furthermore, from even the slightest causes, they now hope for better things and again fear worse ones. For if while they are caught up in dread they see something happening which reminds them of any past good or evil,[10] they deem that it announces an outcome either happy or unhappy: they call it a lucky or unlucky omen on that account, though it dupes

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1 The noun *res*—literally, "thing"—has a variety of connected meanings according to context, including "affair," "concern," "circumstance," "event," "interest," "matter," "reality," "situation," "undertaking." Except for thirty-six instances (see Index of Terms, s.v. "thing"), *res* will always be translated by one of these words, and "things" will be saved as needed for Spinoza's neuter plural adjectives or pronouns; or, alternatively, it will either share an English translation with some other Latin word—e.g. "point" (5.4.1, 2; 7.9.1; 17.6.3)—or else blend with some other word—e.g., "anything" (6.1.1, 21), "emergencies" (17.5.20), "commonwealth" (17.5.26). For an explanation of the citation format used in this translation, see the Translator's Remarks.

2 See Glossary, s.v. "certain."

3 See Glossary, s.v. "counsel." For the expression, cf. Terence, *Eunuch* 57-58.

4 This verb, the passive of *tenere* ("hold"), has the double meaning of being both duty-bound and constrained.

5 Lit : mode. See Glossary, s.v. "mode."

6 See Glossary, s.v. "soul."

7 Lit.: with an easy movement. Cf. Terence, *Andria* 266. See also the account of vacillation in Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. III, Prop. 59 Scholium (trans. W.H. White [rev. ed.; New York: Hafner, 1967], 173f.).

8 Throughout the translation, a small circle occasionally added to a translated word or two indicates a translator's interpolation.

9 In the translation that follows, this verb divides between *scire* ("know" in the scientific meaning of the term) and *cognoscere* ("know" in the broad meaning of the term). To see which is which in each instance, see the Index of Terms, s.v. "knowledge " Both *scire* and *cognoscere* are distinct from *noscere* ("recognize"), *agnoscere* ("acknowledge"), *dignoscere* ("discern"), and *innotescere* ("become known"), respectively. Unless otherwise specified, "knowledge" is always *cognitio*, as opposed to *scientia* ("science") or *notitia* ("acquaintance").

10 Or: bad. Likewise throughout.

them a hundred times°.

4 [3] Besides, if they see with great wonderment something unusual, they believe it is a portent that indicates the anger of the Gods or of the highest[11] Deity; and so, being humans vulnerable to superstition and adverse to religion, they consider it an impropriety not to propitiate it with sacrifices and prayers. And in that mode they fantasize infinite things and interpret the whole of nature in amazing modes, as if it were going insane with them.

5 [4] When these things go on in that way°, therefore, we see especially that those who long without measure[12] for uncertain things are very addicted to every kind of superstition; and they all beg for divine help with prayers and womanish tears—mostly when they are caught in dangers and are unable to be of help to themselves—and call human wisdom vain and reason[13] blind (since it is unable to show the certain way[14] to the vain things they long for). And, on the other hand, they believe that hallucinations of the imagination, dreams and childish idiocies are divine answers—indeed, that God turns away the wise and has inscribed his decrees not in the mind but in the entrails of livestock, and that fools, madmen and birds predict them by divine inspiration and instinct.

6 Fear makes human beings go that insane.

7 [5] Accordingly, the cause {6} from which superstition arises, is preserved and is fostered, is dread. If anyone desires to know specific[15] examples of this matter beyond what has already been said, let him look at Alexander, who from the superstition of his psyche began employing prognosticators[16] when he first learned to fear fortune at the Gates of Susa (see Curtius V.4).[17] Yet after Darius was conquered, he stopped consulting soothsayers and prognosticators until, terrified once more by the disequilibrium[18] of the time—since the Bactrians had abandoned him and the Scythians were provoking a clash, while he himself lay stricken on account of a wound—*having*, as Curtius himself asserts at VII.7,[19] *returned again to superstition, the laughingstock of human minds, he bids Aristander, whom he had told of his credulity, to explore the outcome of the matters with sacrifices.*

8 [6] And in this mode very many examples could be brought up which show the same thing as clearly as possible: that only while dread lasts do human beings struggle with superstition; that all the things they have ever worshiped[20] by vain religion have been nothing but phantasms and the hallucinations of a sad and fearful

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[11] Wherever possible, the adjective *summus* will be translated "highest." At times, however, it will be "utmost," "overall," "high" (as in "...pontiff"), "-in-chief" (as in "commander-..."). The corresponding noun, *summa*, is "sum."

[12] Lit.: mode.

[13] See Glossary, s.v. "reason."

[14] Cf. Glossary, s.v. "mode."

[15] Lit.. singular. Likewise throughout. Cf. note on "showy" at P.3.1.

[16] See Glossary, s.v "prophet."

[17] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander* V.4.1.

[18] Elsewhere· inequity

[19] *History of Alexander* VII.7 8

[20] See Glossary, s.v. "worship "

psyche; and, finally, that prognosticators have ruled among the plebs to the greatest degree, and have been formidable to their Kings to the greatest degree, in the greatest straits of the imperium.[21] But inasmuch as I figure these things have been spread[22] enough among everyone, I pass over them.

¶2 [7] Accordingly, from this cause of superstition, it clearly follows that all human beings are by nature vulnerable to superstition (whatever others say who deem that it arises in that all mortals have some confused idea of the deity).

2 It follows, furthermore, that it has to be quite variable and unsteadfast, as is every laughingstock of the mind and impulse to frenzy; and, finally, that it is defended with nothing but hope, hatred, anger and ruse. No wonder, since it does not arise from reason, but from emotion alone—and a very effective one at that.

3 [8] Accordingly, just as it becomes easy for human beings to be taken in by any kind of superstition, so it is hard, on the other hand, to make them persist in one and the same thing. Indeed, since the vulgar[23] always remain equally miserable, they therefore never acquiesce for long, but only what is new and has not yet duped them pleases them very much; indeed, this unsteadfastness has been the cause of many tumults and atrocious wars. For (as is obvious from what has just been said and as Curtius too, at IV.10,[24] has recognized very well) *Nothing regulates a multitude more effectively than superstition.* Hence it comes about that they are easily induced by a show of religion now to adore their Kings as Gods, and again to execrate and detest them as the common disease of the human race.

4 [9] That this evil might be avoided, therefore, immense study has been employed to embellish religion, true or {7} vain, with worship and pomp so that it might be taken more seriously[25] than any other° motive and always be cultivated[26] by everyone with the utmost observance; at any rate, this has been granted most happily by the Turks, who consider it an impropriety even to dispute, and occupy each's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no place in the mind for sound reason or for doubting anything.

¶3 [10] Be that as it may, if the highest secret of a monarchical regime, and its interest altogether, is to have human beings deceived and to cover up the dread by which they have to be restrained by the showy[27] name of Religion—so that they would fight for their servitude as though for their salvation[28] and would not deem it shameful, but the greatest glory, to spend blood and soul for the vanity of one

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[21] See Glossary, s.v. "imperium."

[22] The Latin verb is akin to "vulgar" in P.2.3 and elsewhere. See Glossary, s.v. "vulgar"

[23] See the previous note.

[24] *History of Alexander* IV.10.7.

[25] More or less lit.: considered weightier.

[26] Or: worshiped. See Glossary, s.v. "worship."

[27] Or: specious. Unless otherwise indicated, *species* and its Latin cognate will always be translated as "show" and its English cognate. The reader, however, is invited to keep in mind as well the term's scientific meaning, which shows up in English as "species" (as at 4 1.1). At the risk of complicating matters here, for reasons of English idiom I have usually had to translate the Latin *singularis* and its Latin cognates as "special" and its English cognates. See Index of Terms, s.v. "show," "special."

[28] Or: welfare. See Glossary, s.v. "welfare."

human being—in a free republic, on the other hand, nothing can be devised or attempted more unhappily. For occupying each's free judgment with prejudices, or controlling it in any mode, conflicts altogether with the common freedom. [11] And as for the seditions that are aroused by a show of religion, they in fact[29] arise in that laws are set down concerning theoretical matters, and opinions are considered a crime and condemned as though they were wicked deeds—their defenders and adherents being sacrificed, not for the public welfare,[30] but only to the hatred and savagery of their adversaries.

2 But if on the basis of[31] the right[32] of the imperium only *what is done were reproved and what is said were said° with impunity*,[33] such seditions could not be embellished by any show of right, and controversies would not be turned into seditions.

3 [12] Accordingly, since this rare happiness has befallen us that we live in a Republic where each is granted the full freedom to judge, and to worship God on the basis of his own mental cast,[34] and where nothing is considered dearer or sweeter than freedom, I believed I would not be doing anything either unwelcome or useless by showing that not only can this freedom be granted in keeping with piety and the peace of the Republic, but moreover it cannot be removed unless along with that same Peace of the Republic and piety. [13] And this is the chief thing I have set out to demonstrate in this treatise. For this it has been necessary, first and foremost, to indicate the chief prejudices concerning religion—that is, the traces of ancient slavery—as well as the prejudices surrounding the right of the highest powers: many, with a most shameless license, are eager to seize this in great part and, by a show of religion, turn the spirit of the multitude—still vulnerable to the superstition of the Gentiles—away from them so that everything would once again sink into servitude.

4 In what order these things are shown, moreover, I will now say in a few words°. But first I will teach the causes that have driven me to write.

¶4 [14] {8} I had often wondered that human beings who boast that they profess the Christian religion—that is, love, gladness, peace, continence, and faith toward all—should clash in a more than inequitable spirit and exercise the bitterest hatred toward one another daily, so that each's faith is recognized more easily from the latter than from the former. For even now the matter has gone so far that you almost cannot recognize who anyone is—whether Christian, Turk, Jew, or Heathen—unless by the outward habit and worship of his body, or because he frequents this or that

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[29] Except for this phrase, which will always translate the adverbial expression *profecto*, "fact" will serve exclusively as a circumlocution where needed to translate Spinoza's pronomial conjunctions.

[30] Or: salvation (as earlier in P.1.3). See Glossary, S.v. "welfare."

[31] See Glossary, s.v. "on the basis of."

[32] Or: jurisdiction. Spinoza assimilates *jus* ("right") to *lex* ("law"); see, e.g., 4.1.1. Wherever "right" seems awkward in English, I have substituted "jurisdiction"—even though Spinoza himself occasionally uses two other words for this last (*dictio, jurisdictio*). In addition, there is the cognate term I have translated as "bidding" (*jussum*). For the full lists, see Index of Terms, s v. "bidding," "law," "right."

[33] Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* I.72.

[34] See Glossary, s.v. "mental cast."

Church, or, lastly, because he is addicted to this or that opinion and is accustomed to swearing in the words of some master or other°.

2 Otherwise life is the same for all.

3 [15] Seeking the cause of this evil, therefore, I did not doubt that it had arisen in that, for the vulgar, regarding the Church's ministries as entitlements and its duties as benefices, and holding pastors in the highest honor, were part° of religion. For as soon as this abuse began in the Church, right away there started in each of the worst of them° an immense lust to administer the sacred duties; and the love of propagating divine religion degenerated into sordid greed and ambition, and likewise the temple itself into a Theater where, not Church Teachers, but orators were heard, none of whom was bound by a desire for teaching the populace, but for carrying them off in admiration[35] for himself and picking at dissidents publicly and teaching only what was new and unusual and what the vulgar admired most. Hence, in fact, there had to arise great conflicts, envy, and a hatred that could not be calmed by any age.

4 [16] No wonder, therefore, that nothing remains of the ancient religion besides its outward worship (by which the vulgar seem more to flatter God than to adore him) and faith is now nothing else but credulity and prejudices—and what prejudices? Ones that render human beings from being rational[36] into beasts, inasmuch as they altogether impede each from using his own free judgment and discerning the true from the false, and seem as though they have been intentionally devised for extinguishing the light of understanding inwardly.

5 [17] Piety and religion, O immortal God!, consist in absurd secrets; and those who completely despise reason, and reject and turn away the understanding as by nature corrupt, are in fact believed to have a divine light: this is the most inequitable thing.

6 Surely if they as much as had even a spark of the divine light, they would not go insane so proudly, but would learn to worship God more prudently; and, on the other hand, they would excel the rest in love as they now do in hatred. Nor would they persecute with such a hostile spirit those who do not feel[37] as they do; but (if, at any rate, they feared for others' salvation and not for their own fortune {9}) they would pity them instead.

7 [18] Besides, if they had any Divine light, it would at least be established from their teaching. I confess that they could never wonder enough at the most profound mysteries of Scripture; and yet I do not see that they have taught anything besides the theories of Aristotelians and Platonists. Now they have accommodated Scripture to these, so as not to seem to be following after the Gentiles.

8 [19] It has not been enough for them to go insane with the Greeks, but they have wanted to have the Prophets obsess with them. Surely this shows clearly that they do not see the divinity of Scripture even through a dream. And the more

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[35] The noun *admiratio* means both "admiration" and "wonderment" (as in P.1.4). Similarly, the verb *admirari*, later in Spinoza's sentence, means both "admire" and "wonder at." The twofold meaning may be intended by Spinoza, and I will occasionally call attention to future instances of it.

[36] Or: by rational means°. Cf. Glossary, s.v. "on the basis of."

[37] See Glossary, s.v. "think."

extravagantly they admire these mysteries, the more they show that they do not so much believe in Scripture as cater to it. This is also obvious in that many suppose as a foundation (for understanding it and extracting its true sense) that it is everywhere truthful and divine. Namely, the very thing that ultimately has to be established from an understanding of it and by strict examination, and which we are taught far better from what does not need human fantasies in the least, they state at the very outset as a rule for its interpretation.

¶5 [20] When, therefore, I weighed these things in my psyche—that the natural light is not only despised but condemned by many as the source of impiety, furthermore that human comments are taken for divine lessons, that credulity is regarded as faith, and that the controversies of Philosophers, and hence very savage hatreds and discords by which human beings are easily turned to seditions, are fomented in Church and in Court by the greatest stirrings of their psyches—and I noticed that very many other things arose which would be too long to narrate here, I painstakingly set about to examine Scripture anew in a full and free spirit[38] and to affirm nothing about it and admit nothing as its teaching which I was not taught by it very clearly.

2 [21] With this caution, I therefore contrived a Method of interpreting the Sacred scrolls[39] and, instructed in this, began before everything to question what Prophecy was, and for what reason God revealed himself to Prophets, and why they were accepted by God—whether it was on account of having grand thoughts about God and nature, or, in truth, on account of piety alone.[40]

3 After I recognized these things, I could easily determine that the authority of the Prophets has weight only in what has to do with the conduct[41] of life and true virtue. Otherwise their opinions touch us little.

4 [22] These things being known, I questioned further what it was on account of which the Hebrews[42] were called God's chosen.[43]

5 When I saw, however, that this was nothing else but that God chose for them a certain area of the world where they could live securely and advantageously, {10} I thereby learned that the Laws revealed by God to Moses were nothing else but the rights of a special[44] imperium of the Hebrews, and therefore no one besides them had to accept them. Indeed, even they were not bound by them unless their imperium was standing.

6 [23] Besides, so that I might know whether it could be concluded on the basis of Scripture that human understanding is by nature corrupt, I wanted to inquire whether the catholic Religion, or the divine law revealed through the Prophets and the Apostles to the human race as such, was anything else but what the natural light

38 Or: psyche (as twice earlier in P.5.1).
39 Or: volumes. Likewise throughout.
40 See Ch. 1-2, below.
41 Or: use Likewise throughout. See Index of Terms, s.v. "use."
42 See Glossary, s.v. "Hebrews."
43 See Ch. 3, below.
44 Or: specific. Lit.: singular. See note on "showy" at P.3.1.

also teaches;[45] and, furthermore, whether miracles happened contrary to the order of nature, and whether they teach God's existence and providence more certainly and more clearly than do the things we understand clearly and distinctly through their first causes.[46]

7 [24] But when I found nothing in the things Scripture expressly teaches which did not agree with the understanding and nothing that conflicted with it, and I saw besides that the Prophets taught nothing but such simple things as could easily be grasped[47] by each, and then embellished them with a style and confirmed them with reasons by which the spirit of the multitude could be moved in the greatest degree to devotion toward God, I persuaded myself altogether that Scripture leaves reason absolutely free and has nothing in common with Philosophy; but the latter as well as the former stands on its own proper footing.

8 [25] That I might demonstrate these things apodictically and determine the whole matter, moreover, I show in what way Scripture is to be interpreted, and that its whole knowledge of spiritual matters has to be sought from it alone and not from what we know by the natural light.[48]

9 Then I go on to show the prejudices that arose in that the vulgar (addicted to superstition just because they love the relics of time above eternity itself) adore the books of Scripture rather than the very Word of God.[49]

10 [26] After these things, I show that the revealed Word of God is not some certain number of books, but a simple concept of the divine mind revealed to the Prophets: obeying God with a full spirit, by cultivating justice and charity.

11 Yet I show that this is taught in Scripture on the basis of the grasp and opinions of those to whom the Prophets and Apostles were used to preaching the Word of God: this they did so that human beings would embrace it without any conflict and with a full spirit.[50]

12 [27] The fundamentals of faith being thereby shown, I finally conclude that the object of revealed knowledge is nothing besides obedience; and so, in its object as well as in its foundations and means, it is completely distinct from natural knowledge and has nothing in common with it; but each occupies its realm without any conflict {11} with the other, and neither has to serve as handmaid to the other.[51]

13 [28] Besides, since the mental cast of human beings is quite varied, and one acquiesces better in some opinions and another in others, and what moves one to religion moves another to laughter, I thereby conclude with° what is said above: each is to be left the freedom of his own judgment and the power to interpret the foundations of faith on the basis of his own mental cast; and whether each's faith is pious or impious is to be judged by his works alone. So, therefore, everyone will be

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45 See Ch. 4-5, below.

46 See Ch. 6, below.

47 Lit.: perceived Cf. Glossary, s.v. "perception."

48 See Ch. 7-11, below.

49 See Ch. 12, below.

50 See Ch. 13-14, below.

51 See Ch. 15, below.

able to obey God with a full and free spirit, and justice and charity alone will be prized among everyone.

14 [29] After I have shown by these things the freedom that the revealed divine law grants to each, I proceed to the other part of the question. Namely, this very freedom can and even has to be granted in keeping with the peace of the republic and the right of the highest powers, and cannot be taken away without great danger to peace and great detriment to the whole Republic.[52] To demonstrate these things, moreover, I begin from each's natural right—for it extends as far as each's longing and power[53] extends, and no one is bound by right of nature to live on the basis of another's mental cast, but each is the avenger of his own freedom.

15 [30] Besides, I show that no one really yields this right unless he transfers to another the power to defend himself; and the one to whom each has transferred his right to live on the basis of his very own[54] mental cast together° with his power to defend himself, necessarily retains this natural right absolutely. And hence I show that those who hold the highest imperium have the right to anything they can do, and alone are the avengers of right and freedom, whereas the rest have to do everything solely on the basis of their decree.

16 [31] But since no one can so deprive himself of his power to defend himself that he stops being a human being, hence I conclude that no one can be absolutely deprived of his natural right; but subjects retain, by the right of nature as it were, some things that cannot be taken away from them without great danger to the imperium; and so, either these things are granted to them tacitly, or they are expressly stipulated with those who hold the imperium.

17 These things being considered, I go on to the Republic of the Hebrews, which I describe at enough length to show how, for what reason and by whose decree Religion began to have the force of right, and also other things in passing which seemed worth the information.[55]

18 [32] After these things, I show that those who hold the highest imperium are the avengers and interpreters not only of civil right but also of the sacred, and that they alone have the right to decree what is just, what is unjust, what is pious, and what is impious.[56] And ultimately I conclude that they retain that right best and {12} can preserve the imperium safely only if each is granted both to think what he wants and to say what he thinks.[57]

¶6 [33] These things, Philosopher reader, are what I give you to be examined here;

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[52] See Ch. 16, below.

[53] Here "power" is *potentia*, rather than *potestas* as earlier in P.5.14. Traditionally, the former term means "potential" rather than raw undifferentiated "power," as wood has the "potential" to be a bed (ef., e.g., Aristotle, *Physics* 193a13), Spinoza, however, collapses the meaning of these two terms into one: "to be able to exist is power [*potentia*]" (*Ethics*, Pt. I, Prop 11, "Another Demonstration"-II [trans White, 48]). A translator's footnote will indicate whenever the two terms, blurred as they are in English translation, occur in close proximity. To tell in all instances which is which, see also Index of Terms, s.v. "power."

[54] Lit.· own proper.

[55] See Ch 17-18 below.

[56] See Ch 19, below.

[57] See Ch. 20, below, with Tacitus, *Histories* I.1.

I am confident that they will not be unwelcome, in view of the preëminence and utility of the argument, both of the whole work and of each chapter. About these things I might add much, but I do not want this preface to grow into a volume,[58] especially since I believe the chief things have been recognized more than enough by Philosophers. Yet I am not eager to recommend this treatise to others; for nothing I might hope for could please them for any reason. For I have recognized how tenaciously those prejudices that the psyche has embraced by a show of piety stay on in the mind. Furthermore, I have recognized that it is equally impossible to take away superstition from the vulgar as to take away° dread. Finally, I have recognized that the steadfastness of the vulgar is their° stubbornness and that they are not regulated by reason, but are carried away by the impulse to praise or blame.

2 [34] Therefore, I do not invite the vulgar, and all who struggle with the same emotions as the vulgar, to read these things, since I would want them to neglect this book completely rather than become troublesome by interpreting it perversely—as they are used to doing with everything—and, while they in no way profit themselves, be an obstacle to others who would philosophize more freely if this one thing did not stand in the way°: they deem that reason has to serve as handmaid to theology. For to the latter, I am confident this work will be useful through and through.

¶7 [35] Otherwise, since many will be likely to have neither the leisure nor the psyche to read everything through and through, I am compelled here too, as at the end of this Treatise, to admonish that I write nothing that I do not subject very readily to the examination and judgment of the highest Powers of my Fatherland. For if they judge that any of these things I am saying conflicts with the ancestral laws or is an obstacle to the common welfare, I myself would want that indicated.

2 I know I am a human being and could have erred. Yet I have been painstakingly careful not to err, and first and foremost in that whatever I wrote would altogether answer to the laws of the fatherland, to piety, and to good morals.[59]

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[58] Or: scroll.

[59] Or: mores.

# *CHAPTER 1*

# Prophecy

¶1 [1] {15} Prophecy, or Revelation, is certain knowledge of some matter revealed by God to human beings.

2 A Prophet, moreover, is one who interprets the revealed things of God to those who are unable to have the certain knowledge of the matters revealed by God, and so can only embrace the matters being revealed by mere faith.

3 For among the Hebrews, a Prophet is called נביא *navi*,[1] that is, orator and interpreter. Yet in Scripture *navi* is always usurped for an interpreter of God, as is gathered from Exodus 7:1.

4 There God says to Moses, *Behold, I constitute you the God of Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your Prophet.*

5 He is saying, as it were: Since in interpreting what you will speak, Aaron acts in the person of a Prophet, therefore you will be the God of Pharaoh as it were, or the one who acts in the role of God.

¶2 [2] We will deal with Prophets in the following Chapter; here we will deal° with Prophecy: from its definition, just handed down,[2] it follows that natural knowledge can be called Prophecy.

2 For the things we know by the natural light depend solely on knowledge of God and of his eternal decrees.

3 But since this natural knowledge is common to all human beings—for it depends on foundations common to all human beings—therefore it is not so well regarded by the vulgar, who are always panting after what is rare and alien to their nature, and spurning natural gifts; and on that account, when they speak of prophetic knowledge, they want this knowledge° excluded. [3] Still, by an equal right it can nevertheless be called divine, as can any other knowledge°, whatever it may be, since God's nature, insofar as we participate in it, and God's decrees dictate it to us, as it were; and it does not differ from the knowledge° everyone calls divine, except that the latter extends beyond its limits, and the laws of human Nature considered in themselves cannot be its cause. Yet in respect of the certainty that natural knowledge {16} involves and the source from which it is derived (namely, God), it does not yield to prophetic knowledge in any mode.

4 Unless, perhaps, someone wanted to understand, or rather to dream, that the Prophets had a human body but not a human mind, so that their sensations and

[1] "Cf. Annotation 1." Spinoza's note.

[2] Spinoza's Latin term is *tradita*, akin to the English word "tradition." This term recurs frequently in the *Treatise*, and will always be translated as either "handed down" or "handed over."

consciousness[3] were of quite another nature than ours are.

¶3 [4] Yet though natural science is divine, its propagators still cannot be called Prophets.[4]

2 For what they teach, other human beings can perceive and embrace with a certainty and entitlement equal to theirs, and not by faith alone.

¶4 [5] Accordingly, since our mind—solely on the basis of containing in itself God's Nature objectively[5] and participating in it—has the power to form some notions explaining the nature of things and teaching the conduct[6] of life, we can deservedly state that the mind's nature, insofar as it is conceived in such a way°, is the first cause of divine revelation. For (as we have just indicated)[7] the idea and nature of God dictates everything we clearly and distinctly understand, not in words but in a far more excellent mode, which best agrees with the nature of the mind—as anyone who has tasted the certainty of understanding has without a doubt experienced within himself.

2 [6] But since my design is chiefly to speak only about things that have to do with Scripture alone, it is enough to have said these few things about the natural Light.

3 Therefore, I proceed to the other causes and means by which God reveals to human beings those things that exceed the limits of natural knowledge—and also that do not exceed them (for nothing impedes God from communicating to human beings in other modes the same things we know by the natural light)—so that I might deal with them at more length.

¶5 [7] Be that as it may, whatever can be said about them has to be sought from Scripture alone.

2 For what can we say about things exceeding the limits of our understanding besides what is handed down to us, by mouth or in writing, from the Prophets themselves?

3 And since nowadays we do not have any Prophets that I know of, nothing is left for us except to roll out[8] the sacred scrolls left to us by the Prophets.

4 With this caution, however: let us not state anything about such matters, or attribute anything to the Prophets themselves, which they themselves did not clearly dictate.

5 [8] But here it is to be noted, first and foremost, that the Jews never make mention of intermediate or particular causes and do not care about them; but because of religion and piety, or (as the vulgar {17} are used to saying) devotion, they always have recourse to God. For if, for example, they have made money in business, they say it has been bestowed on them by God; if they long for anything to happen, they say God has disposed their heart; and if they are even thinking something, they say

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[3] Or: conscience.

[4] "Cf. Annotation2." Spinoza's note.

[5] I.e., as an object or concept in the mind. Cf. P.5.12; also Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaphysica* I.2.2, (in *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, trans. H. H. Britain [La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974], 121); *Ethics*, Pt. I, Props. 17 Schol., 30— though cf. Pt II, Prop. 7 Cor. (trans. White, 58, 66, 83).

[6] Or: use

[7] See 1.2.3.

[8] Or: unravel.

God has said it to them.

6 Therefore, not everything that Scripture says God has said to someone is to be considered as Prophecy and a knowledge above the natural, but only what Scripture expressly says or what follows from the details of the narrative as having been Prophecy or revelation.

¶6 [9] If we run through the Sacred scrolls, therefore, we will see that everything God revealed to the Prophets was revealed to them either in words or in figures, or in both modes—words and figures.

2 The words, moreover, and the figures as well, were either true and outside the imagination of the Prophet hearing or seeing them, or imaginary—no doubt since the Prophet's imagination, even while he was awake, was so disposed that he seemed to himself clearly to be hearing words or seeing something.

¶7 [10] For by a true voice, God revealed to Moses the Laws he wanted to prescribe to the Hebrews, as is established from Exodus 25:22, where he says **ונואדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך מעל הכפורת מבין שני הכרובים** *And I will be prepared for you there and will speak with you out of that part of the covering which is between the two cherubs.*

2 This shows that God used a true voice, since Moses discovered God prepared to speak with him there whenever he wanted.

3 And this voice alone—the one by which the law was produced—was a true one, as I will soon show.[9]

¶8 [11] I would suspect that the voice by which God called Samuel was a true one, since in the last verse of I Samuel 3 it is said, **ויוסף יהוה להראה בשלו כי נגלה יהוה אל שמואל בשלו בדבר יהוה** *And again God appeared to Samuel in Shiloh, since God had been manifest to Samuel in Shiloh by God's word.*[10] It is saying, as it were, that the appearance of God to Samuel was nothing else but that God manifested himself to him by a word, or was nothing else but that Samuel heard God speaking.

2 Still, since we are compelled to distinguish between the Prophecy of Moses and that of the other Prophets,[11] it is necessarily to be said that this voice heard by Samuel was imaginary. This can be gathered as well from the fact that it relayed the voice of Eli, which Samuel was very used to hearing; and so he was able to imagine it more readily as well. For, having been called three times by God, he suspected {**18**} that he was being called by Eli.[12]

3 [12] The voice Abimelech heard was imaginary.

4 For it is said in Genesis 20:6, *And God said to him in the dreams, etc.*

5 Therefore, he could not imagine God's will while awake, but only in dreams (at the time when the imagination is most capable of imagining things that are not).

¶9 [13] The words of the Decalogue, in the opinion of some Jews,[13] were not produced by God; but they deem that the Israelites only heard a sound which did not

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[9] See 1.9.1-15.

[10] I Sam. 3:21.

[11] Dt. 34:10-12.

[12] I Sam. 3:4-8.

[13] Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II.33

produce any words and that meanwhile they perceived the Laws of the Decalogue purely with the mind.[14]

2 This I once suspected as well, since I saw that the words of the Decalogue in Exodus vary from those of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy.[15] From this it seems to follow (since God only spoke once) that the Decalogue does not mean to teach God's words themselves, but only the tenets.[16]

3 [14] Still, unless we want to impugn the force of Scripture, it is to be altogether granted that the Israelites heard a true voice.

4 For Scripture expressly says at Deuteronomy 5:4, **פנים בפנים דבר יהוה עמכם וגו** *Face to face did God speak with you, etc.*, that is, as two human beings are used to communicating their concepts to each other, their two bodies mediating.

5 On that account, it seems to agree with Scripture more that God truly created some voice by which he revealed the Decalogue.

6 As for the cause of why the words and reasons of the one version° vary from the words and reasons of the other, see Chapter 8 about it.[17]

7 [15] Be that as it may, not every difficulty is removed in this mode.

8 For it seems in no small way° alien to reason to state that a created thing, dependent on God in the same mode as other things, could express the essence or existence of God in reality or words, or explain it through his person, namely, by saying in the first person, "I am Jehovah, your God, etc."

9 And although when someone says with his mouth, "I have understood," no one would deem that the mouth has understood, but only the mind of the human being who is saying it—since the mouth is still being referred to the nature of the human being who is saying it, and he to whom it is said had perceived the nature of the understanding as well—the latter° easily understands the mind of the human being who is speaking, through a comparison with himself.

10 [16] Yet as for those who had recognized nothing of God beforehand besides the name and were longing to speak to him to be made certain of his Existence, I do not see how he satisfied their request through a creature (which is not being referred to God any more than other created things and does not pertain to God's nature) who would say, "I am {19} God."

11 I ask, What if God had contorted Moses' lips—but why Moses'? indeed, any beast's—to pronounce and say the same thing, "I am God": would they understand God's existence from it?

12 [17] Furthermore, Scripture seems to indicate altogether that God himself spoke (to which end he descended from heaven above Mount Sinai);[18] and not only did the Jews hear him speaking, but the Great also saw him (see Ex. 24);[19] and the Law revealed to Moses—to which it was not permitted to add anything or take anything

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[14] Lit : with the pure mind

[15] Ex 20.1-14, Dt. 5:6-18

[16] See Glossary, s.v. "tenet."

[17] See 8 1.94-97.

[18] Ex 19:20

[19] Ex 24:9-10.

away[20] and which was instituted as the jurisdiction of the Fatherland—never enjoined us to believe that God is incorporeal nor even that he has no image or figure, but only that God is, and to believe in him and pray to him alone. It enjoined them not to depart from the worship of him and not to attach any image to him and not to make any.[21]

13 [18] For, inasmuch as they had not seen God's image, they could not make any they had seen which would refer to God, but it would necessarily refer° to another created thing that they had seen; and so, when they prayed to God through that image, they would not be thinking of God, but of the thing to which that image referred; and thus, ultimately, they would be attributing the honor of God and the worship of him to that thing.

14 Indeed, Scripture[22] clearly indicates that God has a figure and that it looked at Moses[23] when he heard God speaking; and yet Moses did not happen to see anything except God's backside.

15 Therefore, I do not doubt that some mystery is hidden here, of which we will speak at more length below.[24]

16 Here I go on showing the passages of Scripture which indicate the means by which God revealed his decrees to human beings.

¶10 [19] That Revelation happens through images alone is plain from I Chronicles 21, where God shows David his anger through an Angel holding a sword in his hand.[25]

2 Thus it was for Balaam as well.[26]

3 And although Maimonides[27] and others argue that this history,[28] and all those that likewise narrate the appearance of some Angel, happened in dreams—as did those of Manoah,[29] of Abraham when he deemed that he would sacrifice his son,[30] etc.—and not that in truth someone with his eyes open could see an angel, surely they are babbling. For they have not cared about anything else but twisting Aristotelian trifles and their very own[31] fantasies out of Scripture: nothing seems more ridiculous to me than this.

¶11 [20] By images in truth not real, but dependent on the Prophet's imagination alone, God revealed to Joseph his future Dominion.[32]

¶12 {20} Through images and words, God revealed to Joshua that he would fight

[20] Dt. 4:2, 12:32

[21] Ex 20:2-5, Lev. 19.4, Dt. 5:6-9.

[22] Ex 33:20-23.

[23] At Ex. 33:12, Moses quotes God as having said to him, literally, *You have found grace in my* [sc., *God's*] *eyes.*

[24] See 2.9.17-25, 3.5.35-41.

[25] I Chr. 21:16.

[26] Num. 22:23, 31

[27] See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II.41-42.

[28] Or: story. Likewise throughout.

[29] Jud. 13:3-23

[30] Gen. 22.11-18.

[31] Lit.: own proper.

[32] Gen. 37:5-10

for them,[33] no doubt showing him an Angel with a sword as if the Angel were the leader of an army; God also revealed this to him in words, and Joshua heard it from the Angel.

2 To Isaiah as well (as is narrated in ch. 6),[34] it was represented through figures that God's providence would desert the populace: namely, by imagining God thrice Holy on the highest throne, and the Israelites defiled with the mud of their sins and immersed in dung heaps, as it were, and thus distant from God in the greatest degree.

3 By these images, he understood the present, most miserable state of the populace; their future calamities, however, were revealed to him in words that were produced as it were by God.[35]

4 And on this model, I could bring up many examples from Sacred Writ, if I did not deem that they were sufficiently recognized by everyone.

¶13 [21] But all these things are more clearly confirmed by the text of Numbers 12:6-7, which reads as follows: **אם יהיה נביאכם יהוה במראה אליו אתודע בחלום אדבר בו לא כן עבדי משה וגו פה אל פה אדבר בו ומראה ולא בחידת ותמונת יהוה יביט** *If any of yours will be a Prophet of God, I will be revealed to him in a vision* (that is, through figures and hieroglyphics; for it says of the Prophecy of Moses that it was a vision without hieroglyphics). *I will speak to him in dreams* (that is, not with real words and a true voice). *But not so for Moses: to him I speak mouth to mouth and in a vision, but not in riddles; and he looks at the image of God*; that is, looking at me, he speaks with me as a friend and in truth is not terrified, as is said in Exodus 33:11.

2 Therefore, it is not to be doubted that the other Prophets did not hear a true voice: this is more confirmed in addition by Deuteronomy 34:10, where it is said, **ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו יהוה פנים אל פנים** *And there never was established* (properly: rose up) *a prophet of Israel like Moses, whom God recognized face to face.* This is to be understood as being through the voice alone. For Moses himself had never seen God's face (see Ex. 33).[36]

¶14 [22] Besides these means, I find no others in Sacred Writ by which God communicates to human beings; and so, as we have shown above,[37] no others are to be fantasized or admitted.

2 And although we clearly understand that God can communicate himself immediately to human beings—for he communicates his essence to our minds with no bodily means employed—still, if a human being were to perceive some things with the mind alone {21} which are not contained in the first foundations of our knowledge and cannot be deduced from them, his mind would necessarily have to be more outstanding and far more excellent than a human one.

3 [23] Therefore, I do not believe anyone else has arrived at such a perfection above others besides Christ, to whom God's wishes that lead human beings to salvation were revealed without words or visions, but immediately: thus God manifested himself

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33 Josh. 5:13-15.

34 Is. 6:1-5

35 Is. 6:11-13.

36 I.e., Ex. 33:12, 20. Cf. 1.9.14-15, 20.11-16, 19

37 See 1.10.1-3

to the Apostles through the mind of Christ, as he once did to Moses with an airy voice mediating.[38]

4 And therefore the voice of Christ can be called the voice of God, just like the one Moses heard.

5 And in this sense we can say as well that God's Wisdom, that is, the Wisdom that is above human understanding, has taken on human nature in Christ, and Christ has been the way of salvation.

¶15 [24] But here it is necessary to admonish that I am not at all speaking of what some Churches state of Christ; nor do I deny it. For I readily confess that I do not grasp it.

2 What I have just affirmed, I conjecture from Scripture itself.

3 For I have nowhere read that God appeared or spoke to Christ, but that God was revealed to the Apostles through Christ and that he is the way of salvation[39] and, finally, that the Old Law was handed down through an Angel and in truth not immediately from God, etc.[40]

4 Therefore, if Moses spoke with God face to face as a man is used to doing with a friend[41] (that is, with their two bodies mediating), Christ on the other hand communicated with God mind to mind.

¶16 [25] Accordingly, we assert that, besides Christ, no one received what was revealed of God except by the work of the imagination—by the work of words or images—and so, as far as prophesying goes, it is not the work of a more perfect mind but of a more vivid imagination, as I will show more clearly in the following Chapter.[42]

2 Now here it is to be asked what Sacred Writ understands by the Spirit of God infused in the Prophets, or what the Prophets spoke on the basis of God's Spirit. For investigating this, it is to be asked first what the Hebrew word **רוח** *ruach* signifies, which the vulgar interpret as Spirit.

¶17 [26] The word **רוח** *ruach* in its genuine sense signifies wind, as is recognized; but it is very often usurped to signify many other things, which yet are derived from it.

2 For it is taken, first, to signify breath, as in Psalm 135:17 **אף אין יש רוח בפיהם** *Also there is no Spirit in their mouth.*

3 Second, spirit or respiration, as in I Samuel 30:12, {22} **ותשב רוחו אליו** *And the Spirit returned to him*; that is, he breathed again.

4 Hence it is taken, third, for animation and strength, as in Joshua 2:11, **ולא קמה עוד רוח באיש** *And the Spirit was not established afterward in any man.*

5 Likewise in Ezekiel 2:2, **ותבא בי רוח ותעמידני על רגלי** *And there came into me a Spirit* (or force) *that made me stand up on my feet.*

6 Hence it is taken, fourth, for virtue and capability, as in Job 32:8, **אכן רוח היא באנוש** *Certainly the Spirit itself is in a human being*; that is, science is not exactly to

38 Ex. 19:19.

39 Acts 16:17.

40 Ex. 23:20, Acts 7:53, Gal. 3:19, Heb. 2:2.

41 Ex. 33:11.

42 See 2.1.1ff.

be sought among the old, for I now find that it depends on the specific virtue and capacity of the human being.

7 Thus Numbers 27:18, איש אשר רוח בו *A man in whom there is Spirit.*

8 [27] It is furthermore taken, fifth, for a tenet of the spirit, as in Numbers 14:24, עקב היתה רוח אחרת עמו *Since in him was another Spirit*, that is, another tenet of the spirit, or another mind.

9 Likewise in Proverbs 1:23, אביעה לכם רוחי *I will speak my Spirit* (that is, mind) *to you.*

10 And in this sense it is usurped to signify will, or the decree, appetite and impulse of the spirit—as in Ezekiel 1:12, אל אשר יהיה שמה הרוח ללכת ילכו *Where the Spirit* (or will) *was going, they went.*

11 Likewise in Isaiah 30:1, ולנסוך מסכה ולא רוחי *to pour an outpouring, and not on the basis of my Spirit.*

12 And 29:10, כי נסך עליהם יהוה רוח תרדמה *since God poured over them a Spirit* (that is, an appetite) *for sleeping.*

13 And in Judges 8:3, אז רפתה רוחם מעליו *then their Spirit*—or impulse—*was mitigated.*

14 Likewise in Proverbs 16:32, ומושל ברוחו מלוכד עיר *one who dominates his Spirit* (or appetite), *than one who takes a city.*

15 Likewise in 25:28, איש אין מעצור לרוחו *a man who does not control his Spirit.*

16 And in Isaiah 33:11, רוחכם אש תאכלכם *Your Spirit is a fire that consumes you.*

17 [28] Besides, this word רוח *ruach*, insofar as it signifies spirit, serves to express all the passions of the spirit, and the gifts as well: as רוח גבוהה *haughty Spirit*,[43] for signifying pride; רוח שפלה *downcast Spirit*,[44] for humility; רוח רעה *evil Spirit*,[45] for hatred and melancholy; רוח טובה *good Spirit*,[46] for gentleness; רוח קנאה *Spirit of jealousy*;[47] רוח זנונים *Spirit* (or appetite) *of fornications*;[48] רוח חכמה/עצה/גבורה *Spirit of wisdom*[49]/*counsel*[50]/*strength*,[51] that is (for in Hebrew we frequently use substantives as adjectives), a wise, prudent, strong spirit, or the virtue of wisdom, of counsel, of strength; רוח חן *Spirit of benevolence*,[52] etc.

18 Sixth, it signifies the mind or {23} spirit itself, as in Ecclesiastes 3:19, ורוח אחד לכל *The Spirit* (or soul) *is the same for all*, והרוח תשוב אל האלהים *and the Spirit will return to God.*[53]

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[43] Prov 16:18, Eccl 7.8.

[44] Is 57.15, Prov. 16:19, 29:23.

[45] Jud. 9:23, I Sam. 16:14-16, 18:10, 19:9.

[46] Ps. 143:10.

[47] Num. 5:14, 30.

[48] Hos. 4:12, 5:4.

[49] Ex. 28:3, Dt. 34·9, Is. 11:2.

[50] Is. 11.2.

[51] Is 11:2.

[52] Zech. 12:10.

[53] Eccl. 21:7.

19 Seventh, finally, it signifies areas of the world (on account of the winds that blow there) and even the sides of any thing which look at those areas of the world.

20 See Ezekiel 37:9 and 42:16-19, etc.

¶18 [29] Now it is to be noted that a thing is being referred to God and is said to be God's: First, since it pertains to God's nature and is as it were a part of God, as when is said **כח יהוה** *power of God*,[54] **עיני יהוה** *eyes of God*.[55]

2 Second, since it is in God's power and acts at God's nod: thus in the Sacred Books°, the heavens are called **שמי יהוה** *heavens of God*,[56] since they are God's chariot and home; Assyria is called the whip of God;[57] and Nebuchadnezzar the servant of God,[58] etc.

3 Third, since it has been dedicated to God, as **היכל יהוה** *temple of God*,[59] **נזיר יהוה** *God's Nazarite*,[60] **לחם יהוה** *bread of God*,[61] etc.

4 Fourth, since it is handed down through the Prophets and is not revealed by the natural light. Therefore, the Law of Moses is called the Law of God.

5 Fifth, to express a thing in the superlative degree, as **הררי אל** *mountains of God*,[62] that is, the highest mountains; **תרדמת יהוה** *sleep of God*,[63] that is, the deepest; and in this sense is Amos 4:11 to be explained, where God himself speaks thus: **הפכתי אתכם כמהפכת אלהים את סדום ואת עמורה** *I have overturned you, just as the overturning of God* (overturned) *Sodom and Gomorrah*; that is, just as that memorable overturning; for since God himself is speaking, it cannot be properly explained otherwise.

6 The natural science of Solomon is also called God's science[64]—that is, divine, or above the common.

7 In the Psalms as well, cedars are called **ארזי אל** *cedars of God*,[65] to express their unusual size.

8 And in I Samuel 11:7, to signify a very great dread, it is said: **ויפל פחד יהוה על העם** *and a dread of God fell upon the populace.*

9 [30] And in this sense, everything that surpassed the grasp of the Jews, and whose natural causes they were ignorant of at that time, they were used to referring to God.

10 Therefore, a tempest was called **גערת יהוה** *a scolding of God*,[66] and thunder

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54 Num. 14:17

55 Gen. 6:8.

56 Lam. 3·66

57 Is.10:5.

58 Jer. 25:9, 27:6, 43:10.

59 I Sam. 1:9, Jer. 7:4, 24:1, Ezek. 8:16, Hag. 2:18, Zech. 6:12, 13, Ezra 3:10, II Chr. 26:16, 27:2.

60 Jud. 13:5, 7, 16:17.

61 Lev. 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22.

62 I Sam 36·7.

63 I Sam. 26:12.

64 I Ki. 3:28. Here Spinoza identifies **חכמה** (lit., "wisdom") with **דעת** ("science"; cf. 4.4.40, 43). Likewise at 1.20.15, 4.4.38, and 5.4.19.

65 Ps. 80:11.

66 II Sam. 22.16, Ps. 18:17, 76:73.

and lightning God's arrows.[67] For they deemed that God had the winds enclosed in caverns, which they called God's treasuries:[68] in this opinion, they differed from the Heathens by the fact that they believed that God, not Aeolus,[69] was their ruler.

11 Because of this as well, miracles are called works of God, that is, stupendous.

12 For surely all natural things {24} are God's works, and are and act through divine power alone.

13 In this sense, therefore, the Psalmist calls the miracles of Egypt God's powers,[70] since to the Hebrews, who were not expecting anything like them, they opened the way toward salvation in extreme perils; and therefore they admired them in the greatest degree.

¶19 [31] Since, therefore, unusual works of nature are called works of God,[71] and trees of unusual height are trees of God,[72] it is hardly to be wondered that in Genesis the strongest human beings and those of great stature, although impious rapists and lechers, are called sons of God.[73]

2 Therefore, the ancients—not only the Jews but also the Heathens—used to refer absolutely everything in which someone excelled the rest, to God. For when Pharaoh heard the interpretation of his dream, he said that the mind of the Gods was in Joseph;[74] and Nebuchadnezzar said as well to Daniel that he had the mind of the Holy Gods.[75]

3 Indeed, nothing is more frequent among Latin-speakers as well. For what has been skillfully made, they say has been built by a divine hand: if someone wanted to translate this into Hebrew, he would have to say *built by the Hand of God*, as is recognized by Hebraists.

¶20 [32] With these things, accordingly, the Passages in Scripture where mention is made of God's Spirit can be easily understood and explained.

2 Namely, **רוח אלהים** *Spirit of God* and **רוח יהוה** *Spirit of Jehovah* signify in some passages nothing more than a very vehement, very dry, and fatal wind, as in Isaiah 40:7, **רוח יהוה נשבה בו** *a wind of Jehovah blew into it*, that is, a very dry and fatal wind.

3 And in Genesis 1:2, *And a wind of God* (or a very strong wind) *was moving above the water*.

4 [33] Furthermore, it signifies a great spirit. For the spirit of Gideon and of Samson is called in Sacred Writ **רוח יהוה** *the Spirit of God*,[76] that is, a very bold spirit, prepared for anything.

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[67] Zech. 9:14.

[68] Jer. 10:13, Ps. 135:7.

[69] Virgil, *Aeneid* I.52-91.

[70] Ps. 114:3.

[71] Ps. 33:4ff., 78:7ff., 103:22, 104:31, 111:2ff., 145:5ff., etc.

[72] Ps. 104:6.

[73] Gen. 5 1.

[74] Gen. 41:38.

[75] Dan. 4:5.

[76] Jud. 6:34 (Gideon); 13:25, 14:6, 19, 15:14 (Samson).

5 Thus, too, any virtue or force above the common is called **רוח יהוה** *the Spirit* or *virtue of God*, as in Exodus 31:3 **ואמלא אותו רוח אלהים** *And I will fill him* (namely, Bezalel) *with the Spirit of God*, that is (as Scripture itself explains),[77] with intelligence and art above the common sort of human beings.

6 Thus in Isaiah 11:2, **ונחה עליו רוח יהוה** *And the Spirit of God will rest upon him*, that is, as the Prophet himself declares afterward when explaining it particular by particular in the manner most usual in Sacred Writ, the virtue of wisdom, counsel, strength, etc. Thus, too, Saul's melancholy is called **רוח אלהים רעה** *God's evil Spirit*,[78] that is, a very deep melancholy. {25} For the servants of Saul, who called his melancholy God's melancholy, were the authors of his calling for someone musical to relax him by playing the harp: this shows that by *God's melancholy* they understood a natural melancholy.

7 [34] By **רוח יהוה** *God's Spirit* is signified, furthermore, the mind itself of a human being, just as in Job 27:3, **ורוח אלה באפי** *And the Spirit of God is in my nose*, alluding to what is said in Genesis,[79] namely, that God breathes the soul of life in the nose of a human being.

8 Thus Ezekiel, prophesying to the dead, says in 37:14, **ונתתי רוחי בכם וחייתם** *And I will give you my Spirit, and you will live.*

9 And in this sense, it is said in Job 34:14, **אם ישים אליו לבו רוחו ונשמתו אליו יאסף** *If he* (namely, God) *wants, he will gather back his Spirit* (that is, the mind that he has given us) *and his soul for himself.*

10 So too is Genesis 6:3 to be understood: **לא ידון רוחי באדם לעולם בשגם הוא בשר** *My Spirit will not reason* (or will not decree) *in a human being ever, since he is flesh*; that is, a human being afterward will act on the basis of the decrees of the flesh, and not of the mind that I have given to him to discern the good.

11 So too Psalm 51:12-13, **לב טהור ברא לי אלהים ורוח נכון חדש בקרבי: אל תשליכני מלפניך ורוח קדשך אל תקח ממני** *Create for me a pure heart, God, and renew in me a decent* (or moderate) *Spirit* (that is, appetite); *do not reject me from your sight, and do not take the mind of your holiness out of me.*

12 Since sins were believed to arise from the flesh alone, whereas the mind did not urge anything° except the good, therefore he calls for God's help against the appetite of the flesh, and prays only that the mind the Holy God has given him be preserved.

13 [35] Now since on account of the weakness of the vulgar, Scripture is used to depicting God as like a human being, and attributing to God a mind, a spirit and emotions of the spirit, as well as a body and breath, therefore **רוח יהוה** *Spirit of God* in the Sacred Books° is often usurped for the mind—spirit, emotion, force, or breath of the mouth—of God.

14 Thus Isaiah 40:13 says, **מי תכן את רוח יהוה** *Who has disposed God's Spirit* (or mind)? That is, who besides God himself has determined God's mind to will anything?

15 And 63:10, **והמה מרו ועצבו את רוח קדשו** *And they affected the Spirit of his holiness with bitterness and sadness.* [36] And hence it happens that it is usually

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77 Ex. 31:3-5.

78 I Sam. 16:16.

79 Gen. 2:7.

usurped for the Law of Moses, since it explains God's mind, as it were, {26} as Isaiah himself does in the same chapter, verse 11, **איה השם בקרבו את רוח קדשו** *Where is the one who has put the Spirit of his holiness in his midst*, namely, the Law of Moses, as is clearly gathered from the context of the speech as a whole. And Nehemiah 9:20, **ורוחך הטובה נתת להשכילם** *And you have given them your good Spirit*—or mind—*to make them be understanding*. For it speaks of the time of the Law; and Deuteronomy 4:6 alludes to it as well, when Moses says, *since it* (namely, the Law) *is your science*[80] *and prudence*, etc.

16 Thus too in Psalm 143:10, **רוחך טובה תנהני בארץ משור** *Your good Spirit will lead me into the flat land*; that is, your mind as° revealed to us will lead me into the correct way.

17 [37] The Spirit of God, as we have said,[81] also signifies God's breath, which is also attributed improperly to God in Scripture, just as mind, spirit and body are, as in Psalm 33:6.

18 Furthermore, God's power, force or virtue, as in Job 33:4, **רוח אל עשתני** *The Spirit of God has made me*, that is, the virtue or power of God, or if you prefer, God's decree. For the Psalmist,[82] speaking poetically, also says that the heavens have been made at God's bidding and all the army[83] of them by the Spirit or breath of his mouth (that is, at his decree, pronounced as it were in one breath).

19 Likewise in Psalm 139:7, **אנה אלך מרוחך ואנה מפניך אברח** *Where will I go* (that I might be) *outside your Spirit, or where will I flee* (that I might be) *outside your sight*; that is (as is plain from the things by which the Psalmist himself proceeds to amplify this), where can I go that I might be outside your power and presence?

20 [38] Finally, **רוח יהוה** *the Spirit of God* is usurped in the Sacred books° to express the emotions of God's spirit, namely, God's gentleness and mercy, as in Micah 2:7, **הקצר רוח יהוה** *Is the Spirit of God* (that is, God's mercy) *narrowed? Are these* (cruelties) *his works?*

21 Likewise Zechariah 4:6, **לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוחי** *Not with an army,*[84] *nor by force, but by my Spirit alone*, that is, by my mercy alone.

22 And I deem that verse 12 of chapter 7 of the same Prophet is also to be understood in this sense, namely, **ולבם שמו שמיר משמוע את התורה ואת הדברים אשר שלח יהוה ברוחו ביד הנביאים הראשונים** *And they made*[85] *their heart into*° *a rock,*[86] *lest they obey the Law and the commandments which God sent on the basis of his Spirit* (that is, on the basis of his mercy) *through the first Prophets.*

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[80] Cf. note on 1.18.6.

[81] See 1.17.2.

[82] Ps. 33:6.

[83] The usual English translation of the Hebrew word for "armies," **צבאות**, when referring to the heavens, is "hosts." Unless otherwise noted, Spinoza's Latin equivalent will always be translated "armies" when it appears in Spinoza's own text, and "hosts" when it appeas in Spinoza's Latin translation of a biblical text.

[84] Here the Hebrew word Spinoza is translating is **חיל** rather than **צבא**. See the previous note.

[85] Lit.: constituted.

[86] "All the [Latin] editions have *cautum* ['cautious'], . . . which does not correspond to the biblical text (*shamir*, 'diamond'). According to the correction proposed by F. Akkerman, there is no doubt a printing error for *cautem* ('a rock'), which effectively corresponds to the text of Isaiah." Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 708, n. 72.

23 In this sense too, Haggai 2:5 says, ורוחי עומדת בתוככם אל תיראו *And my Spirit* (or my grace) *will remain among you; do not be afraid.*

24[39] That {27} Isaiah 48:16 says, moreover, ועתה יהוה אלהים שלחני ורוחו *And now the Lord God and his Spirit have sent me*, can be understood in terms of God's spirit and mercy, or even in terms of his mind as° revealed in the Law. For he says,[87] *From the beginning* (that is, when I first came to you to preach God's anger and his sentence[88] produced against you) *I have not spoken hiddenly*; *from the time it was* (produced) *I was there* (as he has attested in ch. 7); yet now I am a joyful messenger, and sent by God's mercy to sing of your restoration. It can be understood as well, as I have said, in terms of God's mind as revealed in the Law—that is, that he has just now come to admonish them on the basis of a command of the Law, namely, in Leviticus 19:17.

25 Therefore, he admonishes them under the same conditions and in the same mode as Moses used to.

26 And ultimately he stops preaching their restoration, as did Moses too.

27 Still, the first explanation seems more harmonious to me.

¶21 [40] From all these things, if we may at last return to what we have been aiming at, these phrases of Scripture become transparent: namely, *the Spirit of God was part*° *of the Prophet*; *God poured his Spirit in human beings*; *human beings were filled with the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit*; etc.

2 For they signify nothing else but that the Prophets had a special virtue above the common[89] and that they cultivated piety with extreme steadfastness of spirit.

3 Furthermore, that they perceived God's mind or tenet. [41] For we have shown[90] that Spirit in Hebrew signifies mind as well as a tenet of the mind; and because of this, the Law itself is called the Spirit or mind of God, since it explained God's mind. Therefore, by an equal right, the imagination of the Prophets, insofar as God's decrees were revealed through it, could also be called the mind of God, and the Prophets could be said to have had the mind of God.

4 And although the mind of God and his eternal tenets have also been inscribed in our minds, and consequently (if I might speak with Scripture) we too might perceive the mind of God, still, since natural knowledge is common to all human beings, it is not so well regarded by human beings, as we have already said;[91] and chiefly not by the Hebrews, who boasted that they were above everyone—indeed, who were used to despising everyone and, consequently, the science common to everyone.[92]

5 [42] Finally, the Prophets were said to have God's Spirit, since human beings were ignorant of the causes of Prophetic knowledge, and admired it; and on that account, **{28}** they were used to referring it to God and calling it God's knowledge, as they did other portents.

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[87] Is 7 10-13

[88] See Glossary, s.v. "tenet."

[89] "Cf. Annotation 3" Spinoza's note.

[90] See 1.17.8-9, 18.

[91] See 1.2.3.

[92] Cf. 3.1.45, 3.35-36.

¶22 [43] We can now affirm without misgiving, therefore, that the Prophets perceived the things revealed of God only by the work of the imagination, that is, by the mediating words or images; and these were either true or imaginary.

2 For, since we do not find any other means in Scripture besides these, we are not permitted to fantasize any others either, as we have already said.[93]

3 [44] By what laws of nature it was done, however, I confess I am ignorant.

4 I might well have said, as others have, that it was done through God's power. Still, I would be seen as babbling.

5 For it would be the same as if I wanted to explain the form of some specific thing by some transcendental term.

6 For everything is done through God's power. Indeed, since Nature's power is nothing but God's power itself, it is certain that we do not understand God's power to the extent that we are ignorant of natural causes. And so it is stupid to have recourse to that same power of God when we are ignorant of the natural cause of some thing, that is, of God's power itself.

7 But there is no need for us now to know the cause of Prophetic knowledge. For as I have already admonished,[94] we are only endeavoring here to investigate Scripture's lessons so that we might conclude ours on the basis of them, as on the basis of the data of nature.[95] About the causes of[96] the lessons, however, we care nothing.

¶23 [45] Accordingly, since the Prophets perceived the things revealed of God by the work of the imagination, there is no doubt that they could have perceived many things beyond the limits of the understanding. For far more ideas can be composed on the basis of words and images than solely on the basis of those principles and notions on which the whole of our natural knowledge is constructed.

¶24 [46] It is obvious, furthermore, why the Prophets perceived and taught almost everything parabolically and enigmatically, and expressed everything spiritual corporeally. For all these things agree more with the nature of the imagination.

2 Now we will not wonder why Scripture or the Prophets speak so improperly and obscurely of God's Spirit or mind, as in Numbers 11:17 and I Kings 22:2, etc.

3 Furthermore, that Micaiah saw God sitting,[97] Daniel as an old man wearing white clothing,[98] Ezekiel just like fire,[99] and those who were there with Christ saw the Holy Spirit as a dove descending,[100] the Apostles as fiery tongues,[101] and, finally, Paul when he was first converted {29} saw a great light.[102]

4 For all these things plainly agree with the vulgar imaginations concerning God

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93 See 1.14.1

94 See 1 5 1-6.

95 Cf. 7.1.9-10.

96 I.e., reasons for.

97 I Ki. 22:19.

98 Dan. 7:9.

99 Ezek 8:2.

100 Mt 3:13, Mk 1:10, Lk 3:22.

101 Acts 2:3.

102 Acts 9 3.

and Spirits.

5 [47] Finally, since the imagination is vague and unsteadfast, Prophecy did not inhere in Prophets for long and was not frequent either, but was very rare—in a very small number of human beings and in them very rarely as well.

6[48] Since this is so, we are now compelled to inquire where the certainty of the things that the Prophets perceived only through the imagination, and not on the basis of the certain principles of the mind, could have arisen for them.

7 But whatever can be said about this also has to be sought from Scripture, since (as we have already said)[103] we do not have a true science of this matter, or cannot explain it through its first causes.

8 What Scripture teaches about the certainty of the Prophets, however, I will show in the following Chapter, where I have set out to deal with Prophets.

[103] Cf 1.5.1-6, 22.3-7.

*CHAPTER 2*

# Prophets

¶1 From the previous Chapter it follows, as we have already indicated,[1] that Prophets were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but with a more vivid power of imagining, as Scripture's narratives also teach abundantly.

2 For of Solomon it is established that he excelled others in wisdom, but not in the Prophetic gift.

3 Those very prudent men Heman, Darda and Kalchol[2] were not Prophets either; and on the other hand, human beings who were rustic and without any learning, were. Indeed, young women too, like Abraham's handmaid Hagar, were endowed with the Prophetic gift.[3]

4 This also agrees with experience and reason. For those who are very powerful in imagination are less capable of purely understanding things; and on the other hand, those who are more powerful in understanding, and cultivate it most, have a power of imagining which is more tempered and more under control, and they hold it by the rein, as it were, so as not to confuse it with understanding.

5 [2] Those who are eager to investigate wisdom and the knowledge of natural and spiritual matters from the books of the Prophets, therefore, err all along.[4] This I have decided to show here extensively, since the time, Philosophy, and, finally, the matter itself demand it: I care little about the growlings of a superstition that begrudges no one more than those who {30} cultivate true science and true life.

6 And alas! the matter has by now gone so far that those who openly confess that they have no idea of God and do not know God except through created things (of whose causes they are ignorant) are not ashamed to accuse Philosophers of Atheism.

¶2 [3] That I might deduce the matter in order, however, I will show that Prophets varied not only by reason of each Prophet's imagination and body temperament, but also by reason of the opinions with which each had been imbued; and so Prophecy never rendered Prophets more learnèd, as I will explain more extensively right away. But first to be dealt with here is the Prophets' certainty, not only since it has to do with the argument of this Chapter, but also since to some extent it serves what we aim to demonstrate.

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[1] See 1.22.1-23.1.

[2] I Ki. 4:21.

[3] Gen. 16:7-13.

[4] Lit.: the whole way.

¶3 [4] Since simple imagination does not of its own nature involve certainty, as every clear and distinct idea does, but something necessarily has to go along with the imagination for us to be able to be certain about the things that we imagine, namely, reasoning, hence it follows that by itself Prophecy cannot involve certainty—since, as we have already shown,[5] it depended on the imagination alone. And therefore the Prophets were certain of the revelation not through the revelation itself, but through some sign, as is obvious from Abraham (see Gen. 15:8), who, on hearing God's promise, asked for a sign. He did indeed believe in God, and did not seek a sign to have faith in God, but to know that it was being promised to him by God.

2 [5] The same thing is also established more clearly from Gideon. For thus he says to God: **ועשית לי אות שאתה מדבר עמי** *And make me a sign* (that I might know) *that you are speaking with me.*

3 See Judges 6:17.

4 God also says to Moses, **וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך** *And this* (is) *the sign for you that I have sent you.*[6]

5 Hezekiah, who had long recognized that Isaiah was a Prophet, asked for a sign of the Prophecy predicting his health.[7]

6 This shows that the Prophets always had some sign by which they became certain about the matters they were imagining Prophetically; and therefore Moses admonishes them to seek a sign from a Prophet, namely, the outcome of some future thing (see Dt. 18, last verse).[8]

7 [6] Prophecy therefore yields in this matter to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, but involves certainty of[9] its own nature.

8 For this Prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral. This {31} is also established from Scripture itself. For in Deuteronomy 13,[10] Moses admonishes that if some Prophet wanted to teach new Gods, although he confirmed his teaching by signs and miracles, he would still be condemned to death. For, as Moses himself goes on to say, God also makes signs and miracles to tempt the populace. [7] And Christ also admonished his Disciples of this, as is established from Matthew 24:24.

9 Indeed, Ezekiel 14:9 clearly teaches that God sometimes deceives human beings by false revelations. For he says, **והנביא כי יפותה ודבר דבר אני יהוה פתיתי את הנביא ההוא** *And when a* (false) *Prophet is induced and has spoken a word, I, God, have induced that Prophet*—which Micaiah also attests to Ahab about the Prophets (see I Ki. 22:23).

¶4 [8] And although this would seem to show that Prophecy and revelation are plainly a doubtful thing, they still had much certainty, as we have said.[11] For God never deceived the pious and the chosen; but, in line with that old proverb (see I Sam.

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5 See 1.6.1-13.1, 22 1-2.

6 Ex. 3:12.

7 II Ki. 20:8; cf. Is. 38:1-22.

8 Dt. 18:22.

9 Lit.: on the basis of. See Glossary, s.v. "on the basis of."

10 Dt. 13:2-6.

11 Cf. 1 2.2, 24.6, 2.2.1-3.7.

24:14)[12] and as is established from the history[13] of Abigail and her speech,[14] God uses the pious as the instruments of his piety, and the impious as the executors and means of his anger. [9] This is also established very clearly from the incident of Micaiah which we have just cited.[15] For although God had decreed deceiving Ahab through Prophets, he still used only false Prophets, and revealed the matter as it was to a pious one and did not prohibit him from predicting true things.

2 Still, as I have said,[16] the Prophet's certainty was only moral, since no one can justify himself before God or boast that he is the instrument of God's piety, as Scripture itself teaches[17] and indicates by the matter itself. For God's anger seduced David into enumerating the populace,[18] and still Scripture attests abundantly to his piety. [10] Therefore, the whole Prophetic certainty was based on these three things.

3 First, the revealed matters were imagined very vividly, as we are used to being affected by objects while awake.

4 Second, the Sign.

5 Third, finally and especially, they had a spirit inclined solely to the equitable and the good.

6 And although Scripture does not always make mention of a Sign, still it is to be believed that the Prophets always had a Sign. For Scripture is not always used to narrating every condition and detail (as many have already noted), but rather to supposing matters as being recognized.

7 [11] Besides, {32} we can grant that Prophets who did not prophesy anything new unless it was contained in the Law of Moses did not need a sign, since they were confirmed by the Law.

8 For example, Jeremiah's Prophecy about the sacking of Jerusalem[19] was confirmed by the Prophecies of other prophets and by the threats of the Law,[20] and therefore he did not need a sign; but Hananiah, who contrary to all the Prophets was prophesying the quick restoration of the city, necessarily needed a sign; otherwise he would have had to doubt his Prophecy until the outcome of the matter being predicted by him confirmed his Prophecy.

9 See Jeremiah 28:9.

¶5 [12] Since, therefore, the certainty that arose in Prophets from signs was not mathematical (that is, one that follows from the necessity of the perception of the matter being perceived or seen) but only moral, and signs were not given unless to persuade the Prophet, hence it follows that Signs were given with respect to the opinions and capacity of the Prophet. Thus a sign that would render one Prophet

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[12] I Sam. 24:14 reads *As the ancient proverb says, "From the wicked comes forth wickedness, but my hand will not be on you."*

[13] Or: story.

[14] I Sam. 25:2-42 (especially 27-30, 38)

[15] See 2.3.9.

[16] See 2.3.8.

[17] E.g., Ps. 143:2, Rom 3:20.

[18] II Sam. 24:1-17, I Chr. 21:1-30.

[19] Jer. 19-20.

[20] Cf. 2.3.8

certain of his Prophecy could hardly convince another who was imbued with other opinions. And therefore the signs varied with each Prophet.

2 [13] Thus too, as we have already said,[21] the revelation itself varied with each Prophet with respect to the disposition of the temperament of the body, with respect to that of the imagination, and with respect to the pattern of the opinions he had embraced beforehand.

3 For it varied with respect to the disposition[22] of the temperament in this mode: namely, if the Prophet was cheerful, to him were revealed victories, peace, and whatever moves human beings to joy besides. For these sorts of men are used to imagining such things more often. If, on the other hand, he was sad, to him were revealed wars, comeuppances, and every evil. And thus, as a Prophet was compassionate, flattering, angry, harsh, etc., to that extent he was more capable of *these* rather than *those* revelations.

4 [14] It thus varied with respect to the disposition of the imagination as well, however: namely, if the Prophet was elegant, he perceived God's mind in an elegant style too; and if he was confused, he did so confusedly. And thus in connection with the revelations that were represented through images besides: namely, if the Prophet was rustic, there were cows and sheep, etc. If, however, he was a soldier, there were generals and armies. If, finally, he was a courtier, a royal throne and the like were represented to him.

5 [15] Finally, the Prophecy varied with respect to the diversity of opinions of the Prophets. Namely, to the Magi (see Mt. 2),[23] who believed in the trifles of astrology, Christ's birth had been revealed through the imaging[24] of a star risen in the east.

6 {33} To the augurs of Nebuchadnezzar (see Ezek. 21:26), the sacking of Jerusalem was revealed in entrails, while the King understood the same thing as well from oracles and from the direction of arrows that he shot upward into the air.

7 To Prophets, furthermore, who believed that human beings act from free choice and their own power, God was revealed as indifferent to and unaware of future human actions.

8 All this we will now demonstrate from Scripture itself, particular by particular.

¶6 [16] First, therefore, it is established from that incident of Elisha (see II Ki. 3:15), who sought an instrument to prophesy to Jehoram and could not perceive God's mind until after he had delighted in the music of the instrument. Then at last he predicted joyous things to Jehoram and friends: this could not have happened beforehand, since he had been angry toward the King. And those who have been angry at someone are capable of imagining evils rather than good things about him.

2 [17] As for what others[25] want to say, however—that God is not revealed to the angry and the sad—they are dreaming. For God revealed that miserable massacre of the firstborn to a Moses angered against Pharaoh, and did so employing an instrument

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[21] See 2.2 1

[22] Reading *dispositione* for *ratione*. Otherwise: pattern.

[23] Mt. 2:1-2.

[24] Lit.: imagination.

[25] Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II.36.

(see Ex. 11:8).

3 God was also revealed to the infuriated Cain.[26]

4 The misery and stubbornness of the Jews were revealed to an Ezekiel impatient in the face of anger (see Ezek. 13:14); and a Jeremiah very saddened, and siezed by the great tedium of life,[27] prophesied the calamities of the Jews. Thus Josiah did not want to consult him but consulted° a female contemporary of his, inasmuch as from her womanly mental cast she was more capable of revealing God's mercy to him (see II Chr. 34);[28] [18] and Micaiah never prophesied anything good to Ahab either, although other true Prophets did (as is obvious from I Ki. 20),[29] but he prophesied evils his whole life (see I Ki. 22:8, and more clearly in II Chr. 18:7).

5 Prophets, accordingly, were more capable of *these* rather than *those* revelations with respect to the varying temperament of the body.

6 [19] The style of the prophecy varied, furthermore, with respect to the eloquence of each Prophet. For the Prophecies of Ezekiel and Amos were not as elegant as those of Isaiah and Nahum, but were written in a cruder style.

7 And if someone who is skilled in the Hebrew language wanted to look into these things more carefully, let him compare with one another some chapters of different Prophets who share the same argument, and he will find great discrepancy in style.

8 Let him compare chapter 1 of the courtly Isaiah, verses 11 to 20, with {34} chapter 5 of the rustic Amos, verses 21 to 24.

9 Let him furthermore compare the order and reasons of Jeremiah's Prophecy that he wrote about Edom in chapter 49, with the order and reasons of Obadiah's.[30]

10 Let him also compare, besides, Isaiah 40:19-20 and 44:8, with Hosea 8:6 and 13:2.

11 And so on concerning the others. If they are all weighed correctly, they easily show that God has no peculiar style of speaking; but he is only elegant, spare, harsh, crude, longwinded, or obscure with respect to the refinement and capacity of the Prophet.

¶7 [20] Even when Prophetic representations and hieroglyphics signified the same thing, they still varied. For to Isaiah, God's glory leaving the Temple was represented otherwise than to Ezekiel. The Rabbis,[31] however, want both representations to have been exactly the same, but that Ezekiel, being a rustic, wondered at it beyond measure[32] and so narrated it in every detail.

2 Still, unless they have had a reliable[33] tradition in this matter, which I hardly believe, they plainly are fantasizing the matter. For Isaiah saw Seraphs with six wings; Ezekiel, in truth, saw° beasts with four wings.[34]

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[26] Gen. 4:5-15

[27] Jer 15:10, 15-18.

[28] I Chr. 34:22-28.

[29] I Ki. 20:13-14, 22, 28

[30] Jer. 49:7-22, Ob. 1:1-21.

[31] Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III.6 (on B.T *Chagigah* 13b)

[32] Lit.: mode

[33] Lit.. certain.

[34] Is. 6:2, Ezek. 1:6, 8, 11.

3 Isaiah saw God clothed and sitting on a royal throne, whereas Ezekiel saw him as fire.[35] Each without a doubt saw God just as he was used to imagining him.

4 [21] Besides, the representations varied not only to that extent, but also in transparency. For the representations of Zechariah's were too obscure to be able to be understood by him without an explanation, as is established from the narrative of them. Daniel's, however, could not be understood even when explained by the Prophet himself.[36]

5 This did not happen on account of the difficulty of the matter being revealed (for it dealt only with with human matters, which do not exceed the limits of human capacity except as they are in the future), but only since Daniel's imagination was not as strong in prophesying while awake as in dreams, as appears from his being so terrified right at the beginning of the revelation that he almost despaired of his strength.

6 Therefore, the matters were represented to him very obscurely on account of a weakness of imagination and lack° of strength; and he could not understand them even when they were explained.

7 [22] And here it is to be noted that the words heard by Daniel (as we have shown above)[37] were only imaginary. Therefore, it is no wonder that, being disturbed at that time, **{35}** he imagined all those words so confusedly and obscurely as to have been able to understand nothing of them afterward.

8 Those who say that God did not want to reveal the matter to Daniel clearly, moreover, do not seem to have read the words of the Angel, who expressly said (see 10:14) *that he came to make Daniel understand what would happen to his populace in the end of days.*

9 Therefore, those matters remained obscure since no one at that time was found who was so skilled in the virtue of the imagination that the matters could be revealed to him more clearly.

10 [23] Finally, the Prophets to whom it was revealed that God would carry Elijah off wanted to persuade Elisha that Elijah had been brought to another place, where he could soon be discovered by them.[38] Surely this clearly shows that they did not understand God's revelation correctly.

11 There is no need to show these things more extensively. For nothing is more clearly established from Scripture than that God gave one Prophet far more grace for prophesying than another.

12 [24] Yet that the Prophecies or representations also varied with respect to the Prophets' opinions that they had embraced, and that Prophets had various, indeed contrary opinions and various prejudices (I am speaking about merely theoretical matters, for those that have to do with probity and good morals are to be thought of[39] quite otherwise), I will show more carefully and at more length. For I deem that this

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[35] Is. 6:1, Ezek. 1:13, 27-28.

[36] Zech. 2:1-13, 4:1-6:8, Dan. 7:1-8:27, 9:20-12:12.

[37] See 2.7.4-5.

[38] II Ki. 2:1-18.

[39] Lit : felt. See Glossary, s.v. "think."

matter is of greater importance. For I will ultimately conclude from it that Prophecy never rendered Prophets more learnèd, but left them in their preconceived opinions; and on that account, we are hardly bound to believe them concerning merely theoretical matters.

¶8 [25] With an amazing rashness, everyone has persuaded himself that the Prophets knew everything that human understanding can arrive at. And although some passages in Scripture would say to us as clearly as possible that the Prophets were ignorant of some things, they would rather say that they do not understand Scripture in those passages than grant that the Prophets were ignorant of any matter, or else they endeavor to twist the words of Scripture so that it might say what it plainly does not mean.

2 Surely if it is permitted to do either of these, Scripture as a whole is done for. For we will endeavor in vain to show something from Scripture, if it is permitted to posit what is very clear among the obscure and impenetrable things or to interpret them at our discretion.

3 [26] For example, nothing in Scripture is clearer than that Joshua, and perhaps the author who wrote his history[40] as well, deemed that the sun is moved around the earth {36} whereas the earth is at rest, and that the sun stood unmoved for some time.[41]

4 Still, since many do not want to grant that there can exist[42] any change in the heavens, they explain that passage so that it would seem to be saying no such thing. Others, moreover, who have learned to philosophize more correctly—since they understand that the earth is moved and the sun on the contrary is at rest, or is not moved around the earth—endeavor with the utmost strength to twist the same thing out of Scripture, however openly it protests. I surely wonder about them.

5 [27] Are we bound, I ask, to believe that Joshua the soldier was skilled in Astronomy? And that a miracle could not have been revealed to him, or that the sun's light could not have been longer lasting than usual above the horizon, unless Joshua understood its cause? To me, either suggestion surely seems ridiculous. I therefore prefer to say openly that Joshua was ignorant of the true cause of that light, and that he and all the crowd that were there together deemed that the sun was moved around the earth by a daily motion and stood still for a while that day; and they believed it was the cause of that longer lasting light, and did not pay attention to the fact that, from the excessive chill that was in the atmosphere at that time (see Josh. 10:11), a greater refraction than usual could have occurred, or some other such thing that we are not inquiring into now.

6 [28] Thus too, the sign of a retrograde shadow was revealed to Isaiah to suit his grasp, namely, through the retrogression of the sun.[43] For he also deemed that the sun is moved and the earth is at rest.

7 And perhaps he was never thinking of parhelia, even in a dream.

8 We are permitted to state this without any misgiving. For the sign could have

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[40] Or: story.

[41] Josh. 10:12-13.

[42] Lit.: be given.

[43] Is. 13:10.

really happened and been predicted to the king by Isaiah, even though the Prophet was ignorant of its true cause.

9 [29] Of the architecture of Solomon, if it indeed was revealed by God, the same is to be said as well. Namely, all its measurements were revealed for the grasp and opinions of Solomon. For since we are not bound to believe that Solomon was a Mathematician, we are permitted to affirm that he was ignorant of the ratio between the circumference and diameter of a circle, and like vulgar workmen deemed that it was 3 to 1.

10 If we are permitted to say that we do not understand the text of I Kings 7:23,[44] I do not know, by Hercules, what we can understand from Scripture, since there the architecture is narrated simply, and merely historically. [30] Indeed, if we are permitted to fantasize that Scripture felt otherwise but for some reason unknown to us {37} meant to write thus, then it would make for nothing else but a complete overturning of the whole of Scripture. For by an equal right anyone could say the same of every passage in Scripture. And so, in keeping with Scripture's authority, we will be permitted both to defend and to perpetrate whatever absurdity or evil can be devised by human malice.

11 Yet what we have stated contains nothing of impiety. For although Solomon, Isaiah, Joshua, etc., were Prophets, they were still human beings, and it is to be figured that nothing human was alien to them.

12 [31] Also, that God would eliminate the human race was revealed to suit the grasp of Noah,[45] since he deemed that the world outside Palestine was not inhabited.

13 In keeping with piety, the Prophets could have been ignorant, and really were ignorant, not only about such matters, but also about others of greater importance. For they taught nothing specific about the divine attributes, but had quite vulgar opinions about God. Their revelations were also accommodated to these as well—as I will now show by many attestations of Scripture, so that you may easily see that they are to be praised and diligently commended not so much for grandeur and preëminence of intellect, as for piety and a steadfastness of spirit.

¶9 [32] Adam, the first to whom God was revealed, was ignorant of God's being all-present and all-knowing. For he hid himself from God and endeavored to excuse his sin before God, as he would have before a human being.[46] Therefore, God was also revealed to him to suit his grasp: namely, as one who was not everywhere and was unaware of Adam's place and sin. For he heard, or seemed to hear, God walking through the garden and calling him and asking where he was. Furthermore, God was asking him on the occasion of his shame whether he had eaten of the prohibited tree.

2 Adam, accordingly, recognized no attribute of God other than that God was the maker of all things.

3 [33] To Cain, God was revealed to suit his grasp as well, namely, as unaware of

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[44] The biblical verse reads: *And he [Solomon] made the molten sea ten cubits from the one brim to the other, rounded all about, and it was five cubits in height: and a line of thirty cubits encompassed it round about* [underlining added]. The underlined dimensions are the basis for Spinoza's claim in 2 8 9

[45] Gen. 6:11-13.

[46] Gen. 3.8-13.

human matters;[47] and there was no need for him to have a grander knowledge of God, for him to repent of his sin.[48]

4 To Laban, God revealed himself as the God of Abraham, since Laban believed that each nation had its own peculiar God.

5 See Genesis 31:29.

6 [34] Abraham, too, was ignorant of the fact that God is everywhere and knows all matters beforehand. For when he heard the sentence[49] against the Sodomites, he prayed that {38} God not execute it before he knew whether all were worthy of that punishment. For he says (see Gen. 18:24), **אולי יש חמשים צדיקים בתוך העיר** *Perhaps fifty just men will be found in that city.* Nor was God revealed to him otherwise. For thus he speaks in Abraham's imagination: **ארדה נא ואראה הכצעקתה הבאה אלי עשו כלה ואם לא אדעה** *Now I will descend to see whether they have done in line with the great complaint that has come to me; and if not, I will know* (the matter).[50]

7 For the divine attestation about Abraham (about which, see Gen. 18:19) contains nothing besides obedience alone, and that he admonished his household to do° the equitable and the good, and not that he had grand thoughts about God.

8 [35] Moses, too, did not sufficiently perceive that God is all-knowing and that all human actions are directed solely by decree. For although God had said to him (see Ex. 3:18) that the Israelites would comply with him, he still called the matter into doubt and replied (see Ex. 4:1), **והן לא יאמינו לי ולא ישמעו לקולי** *What if they do not believe me and will not comply with me?*

9 And therefore God had been revealed to him, too, as indifferent to and unaware of future human actions.

10 For he gave him two signs and said (Ex. 4:8), *If it happens that they do not believe the first sign, they will still believe the last. For if they do not believe the last either,* (then) *take a bit of the water of the river, etc.*

11 [36] And surely if anyone wanted to weigh Moses' tenets without prejudice, he will clearly discover that his opinion of God was that he is a being that has always existed, exists, and will always exist. And because of this, he called him by the name **יהוה** *Jehovah*, which in Hebrew expresses these three tenses. About his nature, however, he taught nothing more than that he is compassionate, gentle, etc., and highly jealous, as is established from many passages in the Pentateuch.[51]

12 Furthermore, he believed and taught that this being so differred from all other beings that he could not be expressed in any image of any thing, or even be seen, not so much on account of a conflict with the thing as on account of human weakness—and besides, by reason of power, that he was special, or unique. [37] He did grant that there were beings who (without doubt, by the order and command of God) played the role of God, that is, beings to whom God gave the authority, right, and power to direct

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[47] Gen. 4:9.

[48] Gen. 4:13-16.

[49] See Glossary, s.v. "tenet"

[50] Gen 18:21.

[51] E.g., Ex. 20:5, 34:14, Dt. 4:24. Cf. 7.3 5-12.

nations and provide for and take care of them. Yet he taught that this being, which {**39**} they were bound to worship, was the highest and supreme God, or (if I may use the phrase of the Hebrews) the God of Gods;[52] and therefore he said in the song of Exodus (15:11), **מי כמוכה באלים יהוה** *Who among the Gods is similar to you, Jehovah?* And Jethro said (18:11), **עטה ידעתי כי גדול יהוה מכל האלהים** *Now I know that Jehovah is greater than all the Gods*; that is, ultimately I am compelled to grant Moses that Jehovah is greater than all the Gods, and special in power. Whether Moses in truth believed that these beings that played the role of God were created by God, can be doubted, since about their creation and principle, he said nothing that we know of. [38] He taught, besides, that this being brought this visible world into order out of Chaos (see Gen. 1:2) and gave seeds to nature, and so had the highest right and highest power to do everything; and on the basis of this highest right and power of his, he chose the Hebrew nation and a certain area of land for himself alone (see Dt. 10:14-15) and left the other nations and regions in the care of the other Gods substituted by him (see Dt. 4:19 and 32:8-9). And therefore he was called the God of Israel and the God of Jerusalem, and the other Gods were called the Gods of the other nations (see II Chr. 32:19).

13 [39] And because of this as well, the Jews believed that the region God chose for them required a special worship of God, completely different from the worship of other regions—indeed, that the worship of other Gods proper to the other regions could not be allowed. For those peoples whom the King of Assyria led into the lands of the Jews were believed to be torn by lions since they were ignorant of the worship of the Gods of those lands (see II Ki. 17:25-26, etc.).

14 [40] And Jacob, in the opinion of Ibn Ezra,[53] said to his sons on that account, when they wanted to head for the fatherland, that they were to prepare themselves for a new worship and put aside alien Gods—that is, the worship of the Gods of the land where they then were (see Gen. 35:2-3).

15 David, too, so as to say to Saul that he was compelled on account of his persecution to live outside the fatherland, said that he was being expelled from the heritage of God and sent to worship other Gods (see I Sam. 1 26:19).

16 [41] Finally, Moses believed that this being, or God, had his home in the heavens (see Dt. 33:27). This opinion was very frequent among the Heathens.

17 If we now pay attention to Moses' revelations, we will find that they {**40**} were accommodated to these opinions. For since he believed that God's nature suffered those conditions we have said, namely, compassion, gentleness, etc., therefore God was revealed to him as befit this opinion of his and under these attributes (see Ex. 34:6-7, where it is narrated in what format[54] God appeared to Moses, and vss. 4-5 of the Decalogue).[55]

18 [42] Furthermore, in Exodus 33:18 it is narrated that Moses sought from God to

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[52] Dt. 10:17, Josh. 22 22.

[53] See Ibn Ezra on Gen. 35:3, Dt. 31:5, 16.

[54] See Glossary, s.v "reason "

[55] Ex 20:4-5 or Dt. 5 9-10.

be permitted to see him. But since Moses, as has already been said,[56] had formed no image of God in the brain, and God is not revealed to the Prophets except with respect to the disposition of their imagination (as I have already shown),[57] therefore God did not appear to him in any image. And this happened, I say, since it conflicted with Moses' imagination. For other Prophets attest to having seen God, namely, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, et al.

19 [43] And because of this, God answered Moses, לא תוכל לראות את פני *You will not be able to see my face*;[58] and since Moses believed that God was visible—that is, that it did not imply any contradiction on the part of the divine nature, for otherwise he would not have asked for any such thing—therefore he adds, כי לא יראני האדם וחי *since no one will see me and live*.[59] God therefore renders a reason compatible with the opinion of Moses. For he does not say that it implies a contradiction on the part of the divine nature—as the matter really is—but that it cannot happen on account of human weakness.

20 [44] Besides, so that God might reveal to Moses that, since the Israelites had prayed to the calf,[60] they became like the rest of the nations, he says in Exodus 33:2-3 that he would send an angel, that is, a being that would take care of the Israelites in the role of the highest being, and that he did not want to be among them. For in this mode he left Moses nothing by which it would be established for him that the Israelites were more favored by God than the other nations, whom God had also handed over into the care of other beings, or angels, as is established from verse 16 of the same chapter.

21 [45] Finally, since God was believed to inhabit the heavens, therefore God was revealed as descending from heaven above a mountain;[61] and also Moses ascended the mountain to speak to God,[62] which there would hardly be a need for him to do if he could just as easily imagine God everywhere.

22 The Israelites recognized almost nothing about God even though he was revealed to them: this they showed more than sufficiently when, a few days later, they handed over the honor and worship of him to a calf and believed it to be the Gods who had led them out of Egypt.[63]

23 [46] And surely it is not to be believed that human beings accustomed to the **{41}** superstitions of the Egyptians, crude, and done in by a most miserable slavery, understood anything sound about God, or that Moses taught them anything but a mode of living—not as a Philosopher, that they might ultimately be compelled to live well on the basis of the freedom of the spirit, but as a Lawgiver, on the basis of the imperium of the Law.

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[56] See 2.9.11-12.
[57] See 2.2.1, 2.5.4, 2.5.8-7.12.
[58] Ex. 33:20a.
[59] Ex. 33:20b.
[60] Ex. 32:1-4.
[61] Ex. 19:20.
[62] Ex. 19:3, 24:9, 12-18, 34:2-4, Dt. 34:1.
[63] Ex. 32:4, 8.

24 [47] Therefore, the plan for living well—or true life and the worship and love of God—was for them more slavery than true freedom and the grace and gift of God. For he bade them to love God and keep his law that they might bear past goods received from God (freedom from Egyptian servitude, etc.), and terrified them with threats besides if they were to be transgressors of those precepts; and if, on the other hand, they were to observe them, he promised many good things.[64]

25 Accordingly, he taught them in the same mode in which parents are used to teaching children who lack all reason.

26 Therefore, it is certain that they were ignorant of the excellence of virtue and true blessedness.

27 [48] Jonah deemed that he would be fleeing the sight of God.[65] This seems to show that he, too, believed that God handed over the care of the other regions outside Judea to other powers, which yet were set up by him.

28 And there is no one in the Old Testament who has spoken of God more reasonably than Solomon, who surpassed everyone of his age in the natural light. And therefore he figured he was above the Law as well (for it was only handed down to those who lacked reason and the lessons of natural understanding); and he gave little weight to all the laws that have to do with the king and which consisted mainly of three (see Dt. 17:16-17). Indeed, he plainly violated them (in which he erred, however, and did what is not worthy of a Philosopher;[66] namely, he indulged in pleasures). He taught that all goods of fortune are vain for mortals (see Eccles.),[67] that human beings have nothing more outstanding than understanding, and that they are punished by no greater comeuppance than foolishness (see Prov. 16:22).

29 [49] But let us return to the Prophets, whose discrepant opinions we have undertaken to note as well.

30 The Rabbis who left us those books of the Prophets (which are the only ones extant now) discovered Ezekiel's tenets conflicting with the tenets of Moses (as is narrated in *Tractate Shabbat*, chapter 1, folio 13, page 2),[68] so that they almost resolved not to admit his book among the canonical ones, and plainly would have hidden it if one Hananiah had not undertaken by himself to explicate it, which they said he ultimately did with great labor and study (as is narrated there). For what {42} reason, however, it is not sufficiently established: namely, whether it was that he would write a commentary that has perhaps perished, or that he would change Ezekiel's own words and speeches (audacity as it was) and embellish them on the basis of his own mental cast. Whatever it may be, chapter 18, at least, does not seem to agree with Exodus 34:7, nor with Jeremiah 32:18, etc.

31 [50] Samuel believed that when God decreed something, he never repented of the decree (see I Sam. 15:29); for he said to Saul, who was repenting of his sin and

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[64] E.g , Dt 6:4-25, with Lev. 26:3-45, Dt. 8:1-20, 27:9-30:20.

[65] Jon. 1:3.

[66] Or: what a Philosopher is not entitled to.

[67] Eccles. 1:2-3 and *passim*.

[68] Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 13b. (trans. I. Epstein *et al.*, *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed* I [London: Soncino Press, 1938], 55). See also 10.2.57, 59.

wanted to pray to God and seek forgiveness for it, that God would not change his decree against him. To Jeremiah, however, the contrary had been revealed (see 18:8, 10): namely, that whether God decreed some harm or some good to a nation, he repented of his decree, provided that human beings changed either for the better or for the worse from the time of the sentence.[69]

32 Yet Joel only taught that God repented of doing° harm (see his 2:13).

33 [51] Finally, from Genesis 4:7 it is very clearly established that human beings can master the temptations of sin and act well. For it is said to Cain, who still never mastered them, as is established from Scripture itself and from Josephus.[70] The same is also gathered very evidently from the chapter of Jeremiah just brought up.[71] For he says that God repents of a decree of his which is brought forth for the harm or good of human beings, insofar as human beings want to change their mores and mode of living. Yet Paul, on the contrary, teaches nothing more openly than that human beings have no imperium over the temptations of the flesh, except by God's special calling and grace.

34 See Romans 9:10, etc., and the fact that at 3:5 and 6:19, where he attributes justice to God, he corrects himself for speaking thus in a human manner and on account of the weakness of the flesh.

¶10 [52] From these things, accordingly, what we were proposing to show is more than sufficiently established: namely, that God accommodated revelations to the grasp and opinions of the Prophets; and that the Prophets could have been, and really were, ignorant of matters that have to do with theory alone and not with charity and the conduct[72] of life; and that they had contrary opinions.

2 Therefore, it is farfetched for knowledge of natural and spiritual matters to be sought from them.

3 [53] We accordingly conclude that we are not bound to believe the Prophets in anything else besides what is the aim and substance of the revelation. In the rest, each is free to believe as he wants. For example, the revelation to Cain[73] only teaches us that God admonished Cain to {43} true life. For that is the only intent and substance of the revelation, not, in truth, to teach freedom of the will or Philosophical matters. Therefore, even if freedom of the will is very clearly contained in the words and reasons of that admonition, we are permitted to think the contrary, since those words and reasons were only accommodated to suit the grasp of Cain.

4 [54] Thus, too, Micaiah's revelation[74] only means to teach that God revealed to Micaiah the true outcome of the battle of Ahab against Aram; and therefore we are only bound to believe this as well. Whatever is contained in that revelation besides this, therefore, hardly touches us: namely, about God's true and false Spirit, and about the

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[69] See note to 2.9.6.

[70] Josephus, *Antiquities* I.55, 56, 58.

[71] See 2.9.30.

[72] Or. use.

[73] Cf 2.9.33.

[74] I Ki. 22.17, 19-22.

army[75] of heaven standing on either side of God, and the rest of the details of that revelation. And so, let each believe about them as seems compatible with his reason.

5 [55] The same is also to be said about the reasons by which God showed Job his power over all things[76]—if indeed it is true that they were revealed to Job and that the author was eager to narrate a history[77] and not (as some believe) to embellish his own concepts: namely, that they were brought in to suit the grasp of Job and only to convince him, not, in truth, that they were universal reasons to convince everyone.

6 [56] Nor is it to be stated otherwise about Christ's reasons by which he convinces[78] the Pharisees of their stubbornness and ignorance, and exhorts the disciples to true life: namely, he accommodated his reasons to the opinions and principles of each one.

7 For example, when he said to the Pharisees (see Mt. 12:26), *And if Satan throws Satan out, he is divided against himself; how, therefore, would his kingdom stand,* he meant nothing except to convince the Pharisees on the basis of their own principles, and not to teach that there are[79] Demons or some kingdom of Demons. Thus, too, when he said to the disciples (Mt. 18:10), *See to it not to despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that their Angels in heaven, etc.*

8 He means to teach nothing else but that they not be proud or despise anyone; and he does not, in truth, mean to teach the rest of what is contained in his reasons: these he brings in to persuade the disciples better of the matter.

9 [57] Finally, the same is absolutely to be said about the reasons and signs of the Apostles; and there is no need to speak of these more extensively. For if all the Passages of Scripture were to be enumerated to me which were only written ad hominem or to suit someone's grasp and are not defended as divine teachings without great prejudice to Philosophy,[80] {44} I would depart far from the brevity for which I long. Let it suffice, therefore, to have touched on some few and universal things; let the more curious[81] reader weigh the rest on his own.[82]

10 [58] Be that as it may, although these things that we have dealt with so far concerning Prophets and Prophecy pertain chiefly to the goal I am aiming at, namely, separating Philosophy from Theology, still, since I have touched on this question in universal terms,[83] it may be inquired in addition whether the Prophetic gift was only peculiar to the Hebrews or, in truth, common to all nations. Then, too, there is what is to be stated about the calling of the Hebrews. About these things, see the following Chapter.

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75 See note on צבאות at 1.20 18.

76 Job 38ff

77 Or: story

78 Or: convicts. Likewise in 2.10.7.

79 Lit.: are given.

80 Or perhaps: without the great prejudice of Philosophy.

81 Or: careful. Cf. 2.7.12

82 More or less lit.: within himself. Or, if *penes* were translated as elsewhere: in his own possession.

83 Lit.: universally.

# *CHAPTER 3*

## The calling of the Hebrews. And whether the Prophetic Gift was peculiar to the Hebrews

¶1 Each's true happiness and blessedness consists solely in the enjoyment of the good and not, in truth, in the glory that he—alone and with others excluded—enjoys as a good. For one who regards himself as more blessèd on account of things going well for himself alone and not so well for others, or on account of his being more blessèd and more fortunate than others, is ignorant of true happiness and blessedness; and the joy he conceives from it, if it is not childish, arises on the basis of no other thing than envy and a mean[1] spirit.

2 [2] For example, the true happiness and blessedness of a human being consists solely in wisdom and true[2] knowledge, and hardly in his being wiser than the rest or in the rest's lacking true knowledge. For this does not enlarge his wisdom—that is, his true happiness—in any way° at all.

3 One who is glad on the latter account, accordingly, is glad at another's evil; and so he is envious and evil, and does not know wisdom or the tranquility of true life.

4 [3] Therefore, when Scripture says, to exhort the Hebrews to obedience to the law, that God has chosen them for himself in preference to the other nations (see Dt. 10:15), that he is close to them and not so close to others (Dt. 4:4, 7), that he has prescribed just laws only for them (4:8), and, finally, that he has become known to them alone to the neglect of the others (see 4:32), etc., it is only speaking to suit the grasp of those who—as we have shown in the previous Chapter[3] {45} and as Moses attests as well (see Dt. 9:6-7)—did not recognize true blessedness. [4] For surely they would not have been less blessèd if God had called everyone to salvation equally. And God would have been no less propitious to them even though he had been equally propitious to the others, nor the laws less just, or they themselves less wise, even if they had been prescribed to everyone; nor would miracles have shown God's power less if they had been made for the other nations as well. Nor, finally, would the Hebrews be less bound to worship God if God had bestowed all these gifts equally on everyone.

5 [5] That God says to Solomon, moreover, that no one in the future after him will be as wise as he (see I Ki. 3:12) seems to be only a mode of speaking for signifying extreme wisdom. Whatever it may be, it is hardly to be believed that God promised Solomon, for his greater happiness, not to bestow such wisdom on anyone afterward.

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[1] Lit.: evil.

[2] Reading *vera* for *veri*. Otherwise: knowledge of the true.

[3] See 2.9.22-26.

For this would in no way° enlarge Solomon's understanding; and a prudent King would not give fewer thanks for such a gift even if God had said that he would grant the same wisdom to all.

¶2 [6] Be that as it may, even if we said that, in the passages of the Pentateuch just cited, Moses spoke to suit the grasp of the Hebrews, we still do not mean to deny that God prescribed those laws of the Pentateuch for them alone, nor that he spoke only to them, nor, finally, that the Hebrews saw such wonders as happened to no other nation. But we mean only that Moses meant to admonish the Hebrews in such a mode, and especially with such reasons, as to bind them more to the worship of God on the basis of their childish grasp. Furthermore, we have meant to show that the Hebrews did not excel the other nations in science, nor in piety, but plainly in something else. Or (if, with Scripture, I might speak to suit their grasp) the Hebrews were not chosen by God in preference to the others for true life and grand theorizings, however often they had been admonished, but plainly for something else. What it was, moreover, I will show here in order.

¶3 [7] But before I begin, I want in the following to explain in a few words° what I understand by God's direction, God's external and internal help, God's choosing, and, finally, fortune.

2 By God's direction, I understand that fixed and unchangeable order of nature, or the chaining together of natural things. {46} [8] For we have said above,[4] and we have already shown in another place,[5] that the universal laws of nature, in accordance with which everything comes to be and is determined, are nothing but God's eternal decrees, which always involve eternal truth and necessity.

3 Accordingly, whether we say that everything comes to be in accordance with the laws of nature, or that everything is ordered on the basis of God's decree and direction, we are saying the same thing.

4 [9] Furthermore, since the power of all natural things is nothing but God's power itself, through which alone everything comes to be and is determined, hence it follows that whatever a human being—who is part of nature as well—prepares for himself as a help for preserving his being, or whatever nature offers him while he does[6] nothing, is all offered to him by divine power alone, insofar as it acts either through human nature or through things outside human nature.

5 Accordingly, whatever human nature can guarantee out of its own power alone for preserving its being, we can deservedly call God's internal help, and whatever turns out to be useful to it on the basis of the power of external causes besides, God's external help.

6 [10] Yet on the basis of these things, what is to be understood by God's choosing is easily gathered as well. For since no one does anything except on the basis of the predetermined order of nature—that is, on the basis of God's eternal direction and decree—hence it follows that no one chooses for himself any plan of living, nor puts any into effect, unless on the basis of a special calling of God, who chooses this

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[4] Cf. 1.22.6, 2 9.8.

[5] See Spinoza, *Ethics* Pt I, Props.16-17, 29 (trans. White, 55-58, 65f.).

[6] Lit . operates.

individual° for this work or for this plan of living in preference to others.

7 [11] Finally, by fortune I understand nothing else but God's direction insofar as he[7] directs human affairs through external and unexpected causes.

8 These things being foretasted, let us return to our intent, so that we may see what it was on account of which the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God in preference to the rest.

9 To show this, I proceed as follows.

¶4 [12] Everything that we long for honorably is related mainly to these three things: namely, understanding things through their first causes, mastering the passions or acquiring the habit of virtue, and, finally, living securely and with a sound body.

2 The means that directly serve the first and the second, and which can be considered as proximate and efficient causes, are contained in human nature itself—so that their acquisition depends chiefly on our power alone, or on the laws of human nature alone. And because of this, it is altogether to be stated that these gifts have been peculiar to no nation {47} but are common to the whole human race—unless we wanted to dream that nature long ago procreated different kinds[8] of human beings.

3 [13] Yet the means that serve for living securely and preserving the body lie chiefly in external things. And therefore they are called gifts of fortune, no doubt since they depend mostly on the direction of external causes of which we are ignorant. So that, in this matter, the foolish may be more or less equally as happy or unhappy as the prudent.

4 Still, for living securely and avoiding the wrongs of other human beings and even of beasts, human direction and vigilance can help much.

5 [14] For this, reason and experience teach no more certain means than to form a society with certain laws and occupy a certain area of the world and channel everyone's strength into one body as it were, namely, that of society. Be that as it may, for forming and preserving a society, no mediocre intelligence and vigilance is required. And therefore that society will be more secure, more steadfast and less vulnerable to fortune, which is founded[9] and directed to the greatest extent by prudent and vigilant human beings. And on the other hand, one that consists of human beings of a crude mental cast[10] depends for the most part on fortune and is less steadfast.

6 [15] That it would still last long is due to another's direction, not its own. Indeed, if it overcame great dangers and matters succeeded favorably for it, it will be unable not to admire and adore God's direction (namely, insofar as God acts through hidden external causes and not through human nature and the mind), inasmuch as nothing happened to it but what was quite unexpected and contrary to opinion. Really, this can even be considered as a miracle.

¶5 [16] Only through this, therefore, are nations distinguished from one another: namely, by reason of the society and the laws under which they live and are directed. And so the Hebrew nation was chosen by God in preference to the others not by

[7] Or: it

[8] Or· races (as in the preceding clause).

[9] Elsewhere· based.

[10] Or: intelligence (as earlier in 3.4 5) See Glossary, s.v. "mental cast."

reason of their understanding, nor by their tranquility of spirit, but by reason of their society, and fortune, by which they acquired an imperium and kept that same one for so many years.

2 [17] This is also very clearly established from Scripture itself. For if anyone runs through it even superficially, he sees clearly that the Hebrews excelled other nations in this alone: they managed those of their affairs that pertain to the security of life happily and overcame great perils, and did so mostly by God's external help alone—whereas in the rest of their affairs {48} they were equal to the others and God was equally propitious to all.

3 [18] For it is established by reason of their understanding (as we have shown in the previous Chapter)[11] that they had rather vulgar thoughts about God and nature. Therefore, they were not chosen by God in preference to others by reason of their understanding—and not by reason of their virtue and true life either. For in this matter they were also equal to the rest of the Peoples; and only very few were chosen. [19] The choosing and calling of them, therefore, consisted solely in the temporal happiness and advantages of their imperium. Nor do we see that God promised the Patriarchs[12] or their successors anything else besides this. Indeed, nothing else is promised in the Law in return for obedience but the continued happiness of the imperium and the rest of the advantages of this life; and in return for stubbornness, on the other hand, the breaking of the compact, the ruin of the imperium, and the greatest disadvantages.

4 [20] Nor is it a wonder. For the aim of society as such and of an imperium (as is obvious on the basis of what has just been said and as we will show more extensively in the following) is to live securely and advantageously. An imperium cannot subsist, however, except with Laws by which each is bound. For if all the members of one society wanted to say farewell to the laws, by the same token they would dissolve the society and destroy the imperium.

5 [21] Nothing else could be promised to the Hebrews' society in return for steadfast observance of the laws, therefore, but the security of life[13] and its advantages; and, on the other hand, no more certain comeuppance could be predicted in return for stubbornness than the ruin of the imperium and the evils that commonly follow from it, and other things besides, which would arise for them in particular from the ruin of their specific imperium. But there is no need at present to deal with these things at more length.

6 [22] I only add this: the laws of the Old Testament as well were only revealed and prescribed to the Jews. For, since God only chose them to consititute a specific society and imperium, they necessarily had to have specific Laws as well. Whether indeed God also prescribed laws peculiar to other nations and revealed himself prophetically to their Lawgivers—namely, under those attributes by which they were used to imagining God—is not sufficiently established for me. This, at least, is obvious from Scripture: other nations as well had an imperium and specific laws with God's external help. [23]

[11] See 2.8.1-10.2.

[12] "Cf. Annotation 4." Spinoza's note.

[13] "Cf. Annotation 5." Spinoza's note

To show this, I will only bring up two passages of Scripture.

7 In Genesis 14:18-20, it is narrated that Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and a pontiff of the highest God, {49} and that he blessed Abraham, as was the Pontiff's right (see Num. 6:23), and, finally, that Abraham, being cherished by God, gave a tenth part of all the spoils to this pontiff of God.

8 [24] All these things show sufficiently that, before God founded the Israelite People, he consitituted kings and pontiffs in Jerusalem and prescribed rites and laws for them. Whether, in truth, he did so prophetically is, as we have said,[14] not sufficiently established for me.

9 At least I persuade myself of this: while Abraham lived there, he lived in accordance with those laws religiously. For Abraham did not receive any rites in particular from God, and nevertheless it is said in Genesis 26:5 that Abraham observed the worship, precepts, institutions and Laws of God: this, without doubt, is to be understood as being about the worship, precepts, institutions and laws of King Melchizedek.

10 [25] Malachi 1:10-11 criticizes the Jews with these words: **מי גם בכם ויסגור דלתים ולא תאירו חנם אין לי חפץ בכם וגו׳: כי ממזרח שמש ועד מבואו גדול שמי בגוים ובכל מקום מוקטר מוגש לשמי ומנחה טהורה כי גדול שמי בגוים אמר יהוה צבאות** *Who is there among you to close the gates* (of the temple)*, lest a fire be imposed in vain on my altar. I have no delight in you, etc. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the peoples, and incense and a pure offering are brought to me everywhere. For my name is great among the peoples, says the God of hosts.* Since no other time can be allowed to these words than the present, unless we want to do violence[15] to them, surely they attest more than sufficiently that the Jews were no more cherished by God at that time than other Nations. Indeed, God became known more to other Nations by miracles than to the Jews of that time, who by then, without miracles, had in part acquired an imperium once more. Furthermore, the Nations had rites and ceremonies by which they were accepted by God.

11 [26] But I dismiss these things; for it is sufficient for my intent to have shown that the choosing of the Jews had to do with nothing else but the temporal happiness of the body and with freedom, or with the imperium, and the mode and means by which they acquired it; and, consequently, with the Laws as well, insofar as they were necessary for stabilizing that specific imperium; and, finally, with the mode in which the Laws were revealed. In the other things in which a human being's true happiness consists, however, the Jews were equal to the rest.

12 [27] Accordingly, when it is said in Scripture that no Nation has Gods equally as close to them {50} as the Jews have God (see Dt. 4:7), it is to be understood only by reason of their imperium, and solely concerning that time when so many miracles happened for them, etc.

13 For, by reason of their understanding and virtue, that is, by reason of their blessedness, God, as we have already said and as we have shown by reason itself,[16] is

[14] See 3.5.6.

[15] Lit.: bring force.

[16] See 3.5.3, with 2.8.1-10.2.

equally propitious to all: this is sufficiently established from Scripture itself. [28] For the Psalmist says in Psalm 145:18, קרוב יהוה לכל קרואיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת *God is close to all who call on him, to all who call on him truly.*

14 Likewise, in verse 9 of the same Psalm, טוב יהוה לכל ורחמיו לכל מעשיו *God is gentle to all, and his mercy* (is) *toward everything he has made.*

15 In Psalm 33:15, it is clearly said that God has given the same understanding to all—in these words, היוצר יחד לבם *who forms their heart in the same mode.*

16 For the heart was believed by the Hebrews to be the seat of the soul and of the understanding, which I figure is sufficiently recognized by all.

17 [29] Furthermore, it is established from Job 28:28 that God prescribed this Law to the whole human race: to revere God and to abstain from evil works, or to act well; and therefore Job, although a gentile, was to God the most acceptable of all, since he surpassed everyone in piety and religion.

18 Finally, it is very clearly established from Jonah 4:2 that God is propitious, merciful, longsuffering, full of gentleness and repentant of evil. For Jonah says, *Therefore I stated before that I would flee to Tarsus, since I knew* (namely, from the words of Moses' which are found° in Ex. 34:6) *that you were a propitious, merciful, etc., God,* and so were about to pardon the gentiles of Nineveh.

19 [30] We therefore conclude (since God is equally propitious to all, and the Hebrews were chosen by God only by reason of their society and imperium) that no Jew, when considered alone outside the society and the imperium, had any gift of God above others, and there was no distinction between himself and a gentile.

20 [31] Since it is accordingly true that God is equally gentle, merciful, etc., to all, and the duty of a Prophet was not to teach the laws peculiar to the fatherland so much as true virtue and to admonish human beings concerning it, there is no doubt that all nations had Prophets and that the Prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews.

21 Really, both the profane and the sacred histories[17] attest to this as well. And although it is not established on the basis of the sacred histories of the Old Testament that other Nations {51} had as many Prophets as the Hebrews, nor indeed that any gentile Prophet was expressly sent by God to the nations, it is in no way° relevant; for the Hebrews cared to write only of their own affairs, not other peoples'.

22 [32] It is accordingly sufficient that we find in the Old Testament that human beings prophesied who were gentiles and uncircumcised, such as Noah, Enoch, Abimelech, Balaam and others. Furthermore, the Hebrew Prophets were sent by God not only to their own, but to many other nations as well.

23 For Ezekiel prognosticated to all the peoples then recognized. Indeed, Obadiah did to none others that we know of except the Edomites,[18] and Jonah was prognosticator chiefly to the Ninevites.[19]

24 [33] Isaiah not only lamented and predicted the calamities of the Jews and sang of their restoration, but did so of other peoples as well. For he says in 16:9 על כן

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[17] Or: stories. Likewise later in 3.5.21

[18] Ob 1:1-21.

[19] Jon. 1:1, 3:1-4

אבכה בבכי יעזר *Therefore, I will mourn Jazer with weeping*; and in chapter 19 he first predicts the calamities of the Egyptians, and afterward their restoration (see vss. 19-21, 25).

25 Namely, that God would send them a Savior to free them and that God would become known to them and, finally, that the Egyptians would worship God with sacrifices and gifts; and at last he calls this nation *blessèd Egypt, God's populace.* All of this, in fact, is rather worth being noted.

26 [34] Jeremiah, finally, is called a Prophet not only of the Hebrew people, but of the peoples absolutely (see Jer. 1:5). Here he weeps when predicting the calamities of the nations as well, and predicts their restoration. For at 48:31 he says of the Moabites, על כן על מואב איליל ולמואב כלה אזעק *Therefore, I will bewail on account of Moab, and I cry out on account of the whole of Moab.* And in verse 36, על כן לבי למואב כחללים יהמה *Therefore, my heart beats like a drum on account of Moab.* And at last he predicts their restoration, even as he predicts the restoration of the Egyptians, the Ammonites and the Elamites as well.[20]

27 [35] Therefore, there is no doubt that the other peoples as well as the Jews had their Prophets, who prophesied to them and to the Jews.

28 Yet although Scripture only makes mention of one, Balaam, to whom the future affairs of the Jews and of other nations were revealed, still it is not to be believed that Balaam prophesied on that occasion alone. For it is very clearly established on the basis of the history[21] itself that he was renowned well beforehand for his prophecy and other divine gifts.

29 For when Balak bids summoning him, he says (Num. 22:6), {52} כי ידעתי את אשר תברך יבורך ואשר תאור יואר *since I know that he whom you have blessed is blessèd and he whom you have cursed is cursèd.*

30 Therefore, he had that same virtue that was bestowed on Abraham (see Gen. 12:3).

31 [36] Furthermore, as he was accustomed to in Prophecies, Balaam replies to the messengers to wait for him while God's will is being revealed to him.

32 When he prophesied—that is, when he interpreted God's true mind—he was used to saying this of himself נאם שומע אמרי אל ויודע דעת עליון מחזה שדי יחזה נופל וגלוי עינים *The saying of him who hears the sayings of God and knows the science* (or the mind and foreknowledge) *of the exalted; he sees the vision of the omnipotent, swooning but with eyes opened.*[22]

33 Finally, after he blessed the Hebrews by God's command (as he was used to doing, no doubt), he began to prophesy to other peoples and predict their future affairs.

34 [37] All this indicates more than sufficiently that he had always been a Prophet, or prophesied very often, and (what is to be noted here in addition) had what especially rendered Prophets certain of the truth of the prophecy: namely, a spirit inclined solely

[20] Jer. 48:47 (Moabites), 46:26 (Egyptians), 49:6 (Ammonites), 49:39 (Elamites).

[21] Or. story.

[22] Num. 24:16.

to the equitable and the good. For he did not bless whom he wanted or curse whom he wanted, as Balak deemed, but only those whom God wanted to be blessed or cursed. Therefore he answered Balak: *Even if Balak gives me as much silver and gold as could fill his house, I will not be able to transgress God's edict and do good or evil on the basis of my own decision. I will speak what God speaks.*[23] [38] As for God's being angry with him while he was en route, it happened to Moses as well while he was setting out for Egypt by God's command (see Ex. 4:24); and as for his accepting money for prophesying, Samuel did the same (see I Sam. 9:7-8); and if he sinned in any matter (see II Pet. 2:15-16 and Jude 11 about this), *Nobody is so equitable as to act well always and never sin* (see Eccles. 7:20).

35 And surely his speeches always had to be worth much with God, and the force of his cursing was certainly rather great, since the fact that God did not want to hear Balaam and turned his curse into a blessing is often mentioned in Scripture as attesting to God's great mercy toward the Israelites (see Dt. 23:6, Josh. 24:10, Neh. 13:2). Therefore, he was without a doubt very acceptable to God. For the speeches {53} and curses of the impious hardly move God.

36 [39] Accordingly, since he was a true Prophet and yet was called by Joshua (13:22) **קוסם** *a diviner* or *an augur*, it is certain that this term is also taken in a good sense;[24] and those whom the gentiles were used to calling augurs and diviners were true Prophets, and those whom Scripture often accuses and condemns were Pseudo-diviners, who deceived peoples just as the Pseudo-prophets did the Jews: this is also established sufficiently clearly on the basis of other passages of Scripture.[25] Therefore, we conclude that the Prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews, but common to all nations.

37 [40] Still, on the other hand, the Pharisees[26] bitterly contend that this divine gift was peculiar to their nation only, whereas the other nations predicted future matters by I don't know what diabolical virtue. (What won't superstition ultimately fantasize!)

38 The chief thing they bring up from the Old Testament, for confirming this opinion by its authority, is Exodus 33:16, where Moses says to God **ובמה יודע אפה כי מצאתי חן בעיניך אני ועמך הלא בלכתך עמנו ונפלינו אני ועמך מכל העם אשר על פני האדמה** *For by what reality may it be recognized that I and your populace have discovered grace in your eyes? Certainly when you go with us, and we will be separated, I and your populace, from every populace that is on the surface of the earth.* [41] Here, I say, they want to infer that Moses asked God to be present to the Jews and reveal himself to them prophetically, and furthermore not to grant this grace to any other nation.

39 It is ridiculous, surely, that Moses would envy God's presence to peoples, or dare to ask such a thing from God.

40 But the reality is that after Moses noted that the mental cast and spirit of his nation were stubborn, he clearly saw that, without very great miracles and God's

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[23] Num. 24:13.

[24] Lit.: part

[25] E.g., I Ki. 18:17-39, 22:5-38, Jer. 28:1-17, 29:8-9.

[26] E.g., Rashi on Ex. 33:16.

special external help, they could not complete the matters that had been begun. Indeed, they would necessarily have perished without such help. And so he sought this special external help of God's, so that it might be established that God wanted them to be preserved.

41 For thus he says at 34:9, *If I have discovered grace in your eyes, Lord, let, I pray, God go among us, since this is a stubborn populace, etc.*

42 [42] The reason why he asks for the special external help of God's, therefore, is that the populace were stubborn; and what in addition shows more clearly that Moses did not ask for anything besides this special external help of God's is God's very reply. For he replied at once (34:10), *Behold, I am making a compact; before your whole populace, I will make wonders* {54} *that have not been made in the whole earth, nor in all the peoples, etc.*

43 Therefore, Moses here is dealing solely with the choosing of the Hebrews as I have explained it,[27] and was not seeking anything else from God.

44 [43] And yet in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, I find another text that moves me more: namely, 3:1-2, where Paul seems to teach something else than we do here. For he says, *What therefore is the preëminence of the Jew? Or what is the utility of circumcision? It is much in every mode. For the primary thing is that to him were entrusted the oracles of God.*

45 But if we paid attention to the teaching of Paul's which he means to teach especially, we will not discover anything that conflicts with this teaching of ours; but on the contrary, he teaches the same thing as we do here. For he says, in verse 29 of the same chapter, that God is the God of both the Jews and the nations; and in 2:25-26, *If a circumcised thing were to recoil from the law, the circumcision would be made a foreskin; and on the other hand, if a foreskin were to observe the command of the law, its foreskin would be thought circumcision.*

46 [44] Furthermore, in 3:9 and 4:15 he says that all were equally under sin—Jews and gentiles. Sin, however, does not exist[28] without commandment and law.

47 Therefore, it is very evidently established here that the law under which all lived was revealed to absolutely all (which we have shown above from Job 28:28 as well):[29] namely, the law that has to do with true virtue alone, and not the one that is stabilized on the basis of the plan and constitution of some specific imperium and is accommodated to the mental cast of one nation.

48 [45] Finally, Paul concludes[30] that, since God is the God of all nations, that is, is equally propitious to all, and all were equally under the law and sin, therefore God sent his Christ to all nations, to free all equally from the slavery of the law, so that they might no longer act well by the command of the Law, but by a steadfast decree of the spirit.

49 Accordingly, Paul teaches precisely[31] what we mean.

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[27] See 3.3.6, 5.1-19

[28] Lit: is not given.

[29] See 3.5.17.

[30] Rom. 3:21-30.

[31] More or less lit.: to suit the carpenter's measuring-stick. (See C. T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon

50 [46] When, therefore, he says, *God's oracles were trusted only to the Jews*,[32] either it is to be understood that only to them were the Laws entrusted in writing, whereas they were entrusted° to the rest of the peoples by revelation and in concept alone; or it is to be said (since he is eager to rebut what the Jews alone could have objected) that Paul is responding on the basis of the grasp and in accordance with the accepted opinions of the Jews at that time. For, to teach what he had partly seen, partly heard, he was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.[33]

51 [47] It is now left for us only to reply to the reasons of some, {55} by which they want to persuade themselves that the choosing of the Hebrews was not temporal and by reason of their imperium alone, but eternal. For, they say, we see that after the loss of their imperium the Jews are survivors, scattered everywhere for so many years and separated from all nations; that this has happened to no other Nation; furthermore, that Sacred Writ seems to teach in many passages that God chose the Jews for himself for eternity; and therefore, even though the imperium has perished, nevertheless they still remain God's chosen.

52 [48] The passages that they deem to teach this eternal choosing as clearly as possible are chiefly, first, Jeremiah 31:36, where the Prophet testifies that the seed of Israel will remain God's people for eternity, no doubt by comparing them with the fixed order of the heavens and of nature.[34]

53 Second, Ezekiel 20:32, etc.,[35] where he seems to mean that, although the Jews intentionally said farewell to the worship of God, God will still gather them back from all the regions in which they had been dispersed and will lead them to the desert of the populaces,[36] just as he led their parents to the deserts of Egypt, and ultimately from there—after he has culled them from the rebels and the backsliders—to the mountain of his holiness, where the whole family of Israel will worship him.

54 [49] Other passages are usually brought up besides these, especially by the Pharisees; but I deem that I will satisfy everyone when I reply to these two. This I will make a speedy business of, after I show from Scripture itself that God chose the Hebrews not for eternity, but only on the same condition that he chose the Canaanites before, who, as we have shown above,[37] also had pontiffs who worshiped God religiously and whom God still rejected on account of their luxury and sloth and evil worship.

55 [50] For Moses, in Leviticus 18:27-28, admonishes the Israelites not to be polluted with incest like the Canaanites, lest the earth vomit them out, just as it vomited out those peoples who inhabited those places.

56 And in Deuteronomy 8:19-20, he threatens total ruin with the same, very express words.

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Press, 1879], s v *adamussin.*) Elsewhere Spinoza uses *praecise.*

[32] Spinoza rephrases the text of Rom. 3:2 as quoted in 3.5.44 In the new phrasing, the text could also mean, *God's oracles were believed only by dint° of the Jews.*

[33] I Cor 9:20.

[34] Jer. 31:35, 37.

[35] Ezek. 20:32-40.

[36] See, for this expression, Ezek. 20:35.

[37] See 3 5.7-9.

57 For thus he says, **העדותי בכם היום כי אבד תאבדון כגוים אשר יהוה מאביד מפניכם כן תאבדון** *I attest to you today that you will absolutely perish, just like the peoples whom God has made to perish from your presence; thus you will perish.*

58 And other passages° in this mode are found in the Law which expressly indicate that God did not choose the Hebrew nation absolutely or for eternity.

59 [51] If, accordingly, the Prophets predicted a new and eternal covenant of the knowledge, love, and grace of God, it is easily proved that it was only promised to the pious. {**56**} For in the same chapter of Ezekiel which we have just cited,[38] he expressly says that he will separate the rebels and the backsliders from them; and in Zephaniah 3:12-13, that God would take away the proud from their midst [39] and make the poor the survivors; and since this choosing has to do with true virtue, it is not to be deemed that it was only promised to the pious of the Jews, with the others excluded; but, plainly, it is to be believed that the true gentile Prophets, whom we have shown all nations to have had,[40] also promised the same to the faithful of their Nations and consoled them by it.

60 [52] Why this eternal covenant of the knowledge and love of God is universal, is also very evidently established from Zephaniah 3:10-11, and so no difference is to be admitted in this matter between the Jews and the nations; nor, therefore, is there also another choosing peculiar to them, beyond that which we have already shown.

61 And there is the fact that, while concerning this choosing, which has to do with true virtue alone, the Prophets mixed in many things about sacrifices and other ceremonies and the rebuilding of the Temple and the City,[41] they wanted to explain spiritual matters in conformity° with[42] the mode and nature of prophecy, under such figures as would at the same time indicate to the Jews—whose Prophets they were—that the restoration of the imperium and the Temple was to be expected at the time of Cyrus.

62 [53] Therefore, Jews today have nothing further which they can attribute to themselves above all Nations.

63 That they have persisted for so many years, dispersed without an imperium, is hardly a wonder, after they so separated themselves from all nations as to turn the hatred of all against themselves—not only by their external rites, which are contrary to the rites of the other nations, but also by the sign of circumcision, which they keep religiously.[43]

64 That the hatred of the Nations preserves them considerably, however, experience has already taught.

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[38] See 3.5 53

[39] This expression has already occurred at 1.20. *75* with the Latin possessive explicit. From now on, Spinoza uses it idiomatically with the possessive merely implicit. Except at 17.5.21, it will always be translated with the appropriate possessive interpolated, as here, or else as "in [or into] evidence," depending on the context.

[40] See 3.5.26-36

[41] I.e., Jerusalem.

[42] Elsewhere: in proportion to.

[43] Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* V.5.

65 [54] When the King of Spain[44] once compelled the Jews to adopt the Religion of the Kingdom or go into exile, most Jews adopted the Religion of the pontiffs.[45] But since all the privileges of natural Spaniards were granted to those who adopted the religion, and they were figured to be entitled to all honors, they at once mixed with the Spaniards, so that after a short time no traces or memory of them remained.

66 Now plainly the opposite happened to those whom the King of the Portuguese[46] compelled to convert to the religion of his imperium. Though converted to the religion, they always lived separate from everyone, no doubt since he declared them {57} not entitled to any honors.

67 [55] I figure the sign of circumcision can also be so important[47] in this matter as well, that I persuade myself that this one thing will preserve this Nation for eternity: indeed, I would absolutely believe that, unless the foundations of their religion were to make their spirits effeminate, they will someday, given the occasion[48]—as human affairs are changeable—erect their imperium once more, and God will choose them anew.

68 [56] We have a splendid example of this matter as well in the Chinese, who even keep a pigtail on their head very religiously, by which they separate themselves from all others; and, thus separated, they have preserved themselves for so many years that they far surpass in antiquity all the rest of the nations. They did not always hold onto their imperium; and yet they recovered it when it was lost, and without a doubt they will recover it again, when the spirits of the Tartars[49] begin to languish in the face of extravagant riches[50] and sloth.

69 [57] Finally, if someone wanted to defend the Jews' having been chosen by God for eternity from this or some other cause, I will not conflict with him, provided that he state that this choosing, whether temporal or eternal, insofar as it is peculiar only to the Jews has to do only with the imperium and the advantages of the body (since this alone can distinguish one Nation from another); yet by reason of understanding and true virtue, no nation is distinguished from another; and so, in these matters, none is chosen by God in preference to others.

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44 Ferdinand of Aragon, in 1492.

45 I.e., Roman Catholicism.

46 Manuel I, in 1496.

47 Lit.: so much.

48 More or less lit : the occasion being given.

49 "Historical error: the pigtail was on the contrary imposed on the Chinese by the Manchou dynasty in 1644. It is this dynasty that Spinoza designates by the name 'Tartar' (originally utilized for the peoples who composed the armies of Ghengis Khan)." Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 722, n. 47.

50 Lit.: the extravagance of riches.

# *CHAPTER 4*

# The Divine Law

¶1 The noun "law," taken absolutely, signifies that in accordance with which each individual—whether all or some of the same species—acts by one and the same certain and determinate plan. It depends, in truth, either on the necessity of nature or on the willingness of human beings. A law that depends on the necessity of nature is one that follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of the thing. One that depends° on the willingness of human beings, however, and which is more properly called right, is one that human beings prescribe for themselves and others for living more safely and more advantageously, or in view of other causes.

2 [2] For example, that all bodies when impinging on other, smaller ones, lose as much of their motion as they communicate to others, is a universal law of all bodies which {**58**} follows from the necessity of nature.

3 So too, that a human being when recalling one thing at once recalls another, similar thing, or one he had perceived at the same time as it, is a law that follows necessarily from human nature.

4 Yet that human beings yield or are compelled to yield their right that they have from nature, and restrict themselves to a certain plan of living, depends on human willingness.

5 [3] And although I will absolutely grant that everything is determined on the basis of universal laws of nature for existing and operating by a certain and determinate plan, I still say that these laws depend on the willingness of human beings.

6 First, since a human being, insofar as he is a part of nature, constitutes a part of the power of nature. What follows from the necessity of human nature, therefore—that is, from nature itself insofar as we conceive it as being determined through human nature—still follows, albeit necessarily, from human power; therefore, it can very well be said that the sanctioning of those laws depends on the willingness of human beings, since it depends chiefly on the power of the human mind, so that the human mind insofar as it perceives things under the pattern[1] of the true and the false can nevertheless be conceived very clearly without these laws, yet not without a necessary law as we have just defined it.

7 [4] Second, I have also said that these laws depend on the willingness of human beings since we have to define and explain things through their proximate causes; and the foregoing universal consideration concerning fate and the chaining together of causes can hardly serve us in forming and organizing our thoughts about particular

[1] Or perhaps: format. (Cf. 2.9.17.) See Glossary, s.v. "reason."

things.

8 Add that we are plainly ignorant of that coordination and chaining together of things, that is, of how things are really ordered and chained together; and so, for the conduct of life, it is better—indeed, necessary—to consider things as open° possibilities.[2]

9 So much for law considered absolutely.

¶2 [5] Be that as it may, since the noun "law" seems applied to natural things by transference, and commonly nothing else is understood by law than a command that human beings can either fulfill or neglect—inasmuch as a law restricts human power within certain limits beyond which it extends, and does not command anything above its strength—therefore it seems that Law is to be defined more particularly: namely, it is a plan of living which a human being prescribes for himself or others in view of some aim.

2 [6] Still, since the true aim of the laws is usually obvious only to a few, {**59**} and mostly human beings are more or less incapable of perceiving it and live on the basis of anything but reason,[3] therefore to restrict everyone equally, lawgivers have wisely established another aim, quite different from the one that follows necessarily from the nature of the laws: namely, by promising upholders[4] of the laws what the vulgar love most, and on the other hand threatening those who violate them with what the vulgar fear most. And so they have endeavored to curb the vulgar as a horse by the rein, so far as it can be done. [7] Hence it has come about that a plan of living which is prescribed to human beings on the basis of an imperium of others is considered law in the greatest degree. And consequently, as those who comply with the laws are said to live under the law and are seen to be subservient, one who gives each his own because he fears imprisonment[5] really acts having been compelled on the basis of another's imperium and by an evil, and cannot be called just. Yet one who gives each his own on the basis of recognizing the true plan of the laws and their necessity acts in a steadfast spirit and on the basis of his own[6] decree—not, in truth, some° alien one—and so is deservedly called just. [8] I deem that Paul meant to teach this as well, when he said that those who lived under the law could not be justified through the law.[7] For justice as is commonly defined is the steadfast and perpetual will to give each his right. And therefore Solomon says in Proverbs 21:15 that the Just one rejoices when Judgment is done, whereas the iniquitous tremble.

3 [9] Since Law is accordingly nothing else but a plan of living which human beings prescribe to themselves or others in view of some aim, therefore Law seems to be distinguished into the human and the divine. By a human one, I understand a plan of living which only serves to protect life and the republic. By a divine one, however, I understand° one that has to do solely with the highest good, that is, with the true

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[2] Lit : as possible.

[3] Or. a plan The latter rendering occurs in 4.1.5 and twice later in 4.2 2, and in 4.2.3(twice), 5, 6(twice). Cf Glossary, s.v. "reason."

[4] Lit.: defenders.

[5] Lit.: a yoke (akin to modern handcuffs, or ball and chain).

[6] Or· a proper.

[7] See Rom. 3:20.

knowledge and love of God.

4 The reason why I call this law divine is on account of the nature of the highest good, which I will here show in a few words° and as clearly as I can.

¶3 [10] Since the better part of ourselves is the understanding, it is certain that, if we really want to seek what is useful for ourselves, we have to endeavor above all to perfect our understanding as much as can be done. For our highest good has to consist in its perfection.

2 Further, since all our knowledge, and the certainty that really removes all doubt, depends solely on knowledge of God—both since without God nothing can be or be conceived, and since we can doubt {60} all things so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God—hence it follows that our highest good and perfection depends solely on knowledge of God, etc.

3 [11] Furthermore, since nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that everything that is in nature involves and expresses the concept of God by reason of its essence and its perfection; and therefore, the more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God which we acquire. Or (since knowledge of an effect through the cause is nothing else than knowing some property of the cause), the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know God's essence (which is the cause of all natural things). [12] And so the whole of our knowledge, that is, our highest good, not only depends on knowledge of God, but consists of it altogether. This also follows from the fact that a human being is also more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing that he loves in preference to the rest, and vice versa. And so, one who loves above all the intellectual knowledge of God—no doubt the most perfect being—and delights in it most, is necessarily the most perfect, and participates most in the highest blessedness.

4 Our highest good and our blessedness accordingly goes back to this: knowledge and love of God.

5 [13] The means that this aim of all human actions requires—namely, God himself insofar as his idea is in us—can therefore be called God's biddings, since they are prescribed to us, as it were, by God himself insofar as he exists in our mind; and so the plan of living which has to do with this aim is best called the Divine law.

6 What these means are and what plan of living this aim requires, and how the foundations of the best republic and the plan of living among human beings follow from it, however, pertains to universal Ethics.[8]

7 Here I go on to deal with the divine law only in general.

¶4 [14] Since love of God is accordingly the highest happiness and blessedness and the ultimate aim of a human being and the goal of all human actions, it follows that one follows the divine law only by taking care to love God not on the basis of fear of a comeuppance or in preference to the love of some other thing, like pleasures, fame, etc., but solely on the basis of the fact that he recognizes God, or that he recognizes that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good.

2 [15] The sum of the divine law and its highest precept, therefore, is to love God as

[8] Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. III, Pref., with, e.g., Pt. I, Prop. 33, Pt. IV, Def. 8 and Prop. 37 (trans. White, 127-28, 68-71, 191, 214-17).

the {61} highest good, namely, as we have already said, not on the basis of dread of some comeuppance and punishment, nor in view of the love of some other thing in which we long to delight. For the idea of God dictates that God is our highest good, or that the knowledge and love of God is the ultimate aim toward which all our actions are to be directed.

3 [16] Yet a carnal human being is unable to understand these things; and they seem to him vain, since he has an extremely meager knowledge of God, and also since he finds nothing in this highest good which he might touch or eat or, finally, which might affect the flesh—in which he delights most—inasmuch as it consists solely in theorizing and purely in the mind.[9]

4 Yet those who recognize that they have nothing more outstanding than understanding and a sound mind will no doubt judge these things to be very solid.

5 [17] We have accordingly explained what the divine law mainly consists of; and we have explained what human laws are, namely, all those laws that aim at some other goal—unless they have been sanctioned by revelation. For things are referred to God by this consideration as well (as we have shown above);[10] and in this sense the law of Moses, although it was not universal but was accommodated in the greatest degree to the mental cast and special preservation of one populace, can still be called the Law of God, or the divine Law, inasmuch as we believe it has been sanctioned by the Prophetic light.

6 [18] If we now pay attention to the Nature of the natural divine law as we have just explained it, we will see, first, that it is universal or common to all human beings. For we have deduced it from universal human nature. Second, it does not require a faith in histories,[11] whatever they may ultimately be; for since this natural divine Law is understood solely from the consideration of human nature, it is certain that we can conceive it in Adam equally as well as in any other human being—in a human being who lives among human beings, equally as well as in a human being who leads a solitary life.

7 [19] Nor can a faith in histories, however certain, give us knowledge of God, or consequently love of God as well. For love of God arises from knowledge of him. Knowledge of him, however, has to be drawn from common notions that are certain in themselves and self-evident,[12] so that it is far from necessary that a faith in histories is a prerequisite for us to arrive at our highest good.

8 Still, although a faith in histories is unable to give us knowledge and love of God, yet we do not deny that, for the reason of civil life, a reading of them is very useful. {62} For the more we observe—and the better we recognize—the mores[13] and conditions of human beings, which cannot be recognized by anything better than by their actions, the more we will be able to live more cautiously among them and better accommodate our actions and life to their mental cast, as much as reason lets us°.

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[9] Lit.: in the pure mind. Likewise at 4.4.27.

[10] See 2.9.8-25.

[11] Or: stories. Likewise in 4.4.7f., 12.

[12] More or less lit.: certain and recognized through themselves.

[13] Or· morals.

9 [20] We see, third, that this natural divine law does not require ceremonies, that is, actions that are indifferent in themselves and are called good solely by being instituted, or which represent some good necessary for salvation, or, if you prefer, actions whose reason surpasses human grasp. For the natural light requires nothing that that same light does not reach, but only what it can indicate very clearly to us as being good, or a means to our blessedness. What is good solely by commandment and by being instituted, or by being representations of some good, however, is unable to perfect our understanding and is nothing else but mere shadows and cannot be enumerated among the actions that are, as it were, the offspring or fruit of understanding and of a sound mind.

10 There is no need here to show this at more length.

11 [21] Fourth, finally, we see that the highest reward of the divine law is the law itself[14]—namely, knowing God and loving him out of true freedom and a full and steadfast spirit—the punishment being deprivation of these and slavery of the flesh, or an unsteadfast and vacillating spirit.

12 [22] With these things so noted, it is now to be inquired: First, can we, by the natural light, conceive God as a lawgiver or prince prescribing laws to human beings? Second, what does Sacred Scripture teach about this natural light and law? Third, to what end were the ceremonies once instituted? Finally, fourth, what is the relevance of knowing the sacred histories and believing in them?

13 I will deal with the first two in this Chapter, and the last two in the following one.[15]

14 [23] What is to be stated about the first is easily deduced from the nature of God's will, which is not distinguished from God's understanding except with respect to our reason. That is, God's will and God's understanding are in themselves really one and the same. Nor are they distinguished except with respect to our thoughts that we have formed of God's understanding.

15 [24] For example, when we pay attention to the fact that the nature of a triangle is contained in the divine nature from eternity as an eternal truth, we then say that God has the idea of a triangle, or understands the nature of a triangle. But when {63} we afterward pay attention to the fact that the nature of a triangle is thus contained in the divine nature solely out of the necessity of the divine nature, and not out of the necessity of the essence and nature of a triangle—indeed, that the necessity of the essence and properties of a triangle, insofar as they are conceived as eternal truths as well, depends solely on the necessity of the divine nature and understanding, and not on the nature of the triangle—then the same thing we have called God's understanding, we call God's will or decree.

16 [25] With respect to God, therefore, we affirm one and the same thing when we say that God has decreed and willed from eternity that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and that God has understood this same thing.

17 Hence it follows that God's affirmations and negations always involve eternal

[14] Cf. Mishnah, *Avot* 4:2 (*Mishnayoth*, ed. and trans. P. Blackman [6 vols.; 2nd ed.; Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, 1977], IV, 516).

[15] See, respectively, 4.4.14-31, 4.4.32-50, 5.1.1-3.10, and 5.3.11-4.24.

necessity or truth.

18 [26] Accordingly, if, for example, God said to Adam that he did not want Adam to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it would be a contradiction for Adam to be able to eat from that tree; and so it would be impossible for Adam to eat from it. For that divine decree had to involve eternal necessity and truth.

19 But yet, since Scripture narrates that God enjoined it on Adam and nevertheless Adam ate from the tree,[16] it is necessarily to be said that God only revealed to Adam the evil that would necessarily follow for him if he ate from that tree, but not the necessary consequence of that evil. [27] Hence it came about that Adam did not perceive that revelation as an eternal and necessary truth, but as a law, that is, as something° instituted; for the gain or loss follows not from the necessity and nature of the action of the perpetrator, but solely from the discretion and absolute imperium of some Prince.

20 Therefore, that revelation was a law—and God a lawgiver or Prince, as it were—solely with respect to Adam, and solely on account of the deficiency of his knowledge.

21 [28] And because of this as well, namely, in view of the deficiency of knowledge, the Decalogue was only a law with respect to the Hebrews. For since they did not recognize God's existence as an eternal truth, therefore what was revealed to them in the Decalogue—namely, that God exists and that God alone is to be prayed to—had to have been perceived as a law. For if God had spoken to them with no bodily means employed, but immediately, they would have perceived this same thing not as a law, but as an eternal truth.

22 [29] Yet what we are saying of the Israelites and Adam is to be said of all Prophets who {64} wrote laws in the name of God as well: viz., they did not perceive God's decrees adequately as eternal truths.

23 For example, it is also to be said of Moses himself that he perceived from revelation, or from the foundations revealed to him, the mode in which the Israelite populace could best be united in a certain area of the world and form a full society, or erect an imperium. Furthermore, he also perceived the mode in which that populace could best be compelled to obey; but he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that that mode was the best, nor that the goal at which the laws aimed followed necessarily from the common obedience of the populace in such an area of the world.

24 [30] On that account, he did not perceive all these things as eternal truths, but as precepts and things instituted, and enjoined them as God's laws. And hence it came about that God was imagined as ruler, lawgiver, king, compassionate, just, etc., while yet all these things are attributes of human nature alone and are to be completely removed from the divine nature. And I say that this is to be said solely of the Prophets who wrote laws in God's name—not, however, of Christ. [31] For of Christ, although he seems to have written laws in God's name as well, still it is to be thought[17] that he perceived things truly and adequately. For Christ was not so much a Prophet, as the

[16] Gen 2:16-17, 3:6.
[17] Lit.: felt.

mouth of God.

25 For God revealed some things to the human race through the mind of Christ (as we have shown in Ch. 1)[18] just as he had revealed things before through Angels—namely, through a created voice, visions, etc.

26 On that account, it would be equally alien to reason to state that God accommodated his revelations to the opinions of Christ, and that to communicate the matters to be revealed to the Prophets God accommodated his revelations beforehand to the opinions of angels, that is, of created voices and visions: nothing more absurd than this can be stated, especially since Christ was not sent to teach the Jews alone, but the whole human race; and so it was not enough for him to have a mind accommodated only to the opinions of the Jews, but to the opinions and lessons universal to the human race, that is, to notions that are common and true.

27 [32] And surely, from the fact that God revealed himself immediately to Christ or to his mind, and not through words and images, as he did to the Prophets, we cannot understand anything else but that Christ perceived or understood the revealed things truly. For a thing is understood when it is perceived purely by the mind, apart from the words and images. **{65}**

28 Christ, accordingly, perceived revealed matters truly and adequately. [33] If, therefore, he ever prescribed them as laws, he did so on account of the ignorance and stubbornness of the populace. In this matter, therefore, he played the role of God; for he accommodated himself to the mental cast of the populace; and therefore, although he spoke somewhat more clearly than the other Prophets, he still taught revealed matters obscurely, and very often through parables, especially since he spoke to those to whom it had not yet been given to understand the kingdom of heaven (see Mt. 13:10, etc.); [34] and, without a doubt, to those to whom it had been given to recognize the mysteries of heaven, he taught matters as eternal truths and did not prescribe them as laws; and for this reason, he freed them from the slavery of the law, and nevertheless confirmed and stabilized this law more and inscribed it inwardly on their hearts.

29 Paul seems to indicate this in certain passages as well, namely, in Romans 7:6 and 3:28.

30 [35] Still, he did not want to speak openly either; but as he says in 3:5 and 6:19 of the same Epistle, he speaks in a human manner, as he says expressly when he calls God just; and, without doubt, he also attaches compassion, grace, anger, etc., to God on account of the weakness of the flesh; and he accommodates his words to the mental cast of the plebs, or (as he says as well in I Cor. 3:1-2) of carnal human beings. [36] For in Romans 9:18, he teaches absolutely that God's anger and his mercy do not depend on human works, but solely on God's calling, that is, will. Furthermore, he teaches that no one becomes just by the works of the law, but solely by faith (see Rom. 3:28), by which surely he understands nothing other than the complete consent of the spirit; and, finally, he teaches that no one becomes blessèd unless he has in him the mind of Christ (see Rom. 8:9), by which he perceives God's laws as eternal truths.

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[18] See 1 14 3-5.4.

31 [37] We accordingly conclude that God is not described as a lawgiver or prince and called just, compassionate, etc., except as befits the grasp of the vulgar, and solely from a deficiency of knowledge; and that God really acts and directs everything solely out of the necessity of his own nature and perfection; and, finally, that his decrees and volitions are eternal truths and always involve necessity—and that is what I had set out to explain and show in the first place.[19]

32 [38] Let us therefore go over to the second thing,[20] and run through the Sacred Page and see what it teaches about **{66}** the natural light and this divine law.

33 The first thing that occurs to us is the very history[21] of the first human being, where it is narrated that God enjoined Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: this seems to signify that God enjoined Adam to do and seek the good for the reason of the good and not insofar as it is contrary to evil—that is, that he seek the good out of love of the good and not out of a fear of evil. For, as we have already shown,[22] he who does the good out of true knowledge and love of the good acts freely and in a steadfast spirit, whereas he who acts out of a fear of evil is compelled by the evil and acts slavishly and lives under another's imperium; [39] and so this unique precept° that God gave Adam comprehends the whole natural divine law and absolutely agrees with the dictate of the natural light, and it would not be difficult to explain the history or parable of the first human being from this foundation. But I prefer to dismiss it, both since I cannot be absolutely certain whether my explanation would agree with the mind of the writer, and since many do not grant that this history is a parable, but state plainly that it is a simple narrative.

34 [40] It will therefore be preferable to bring other passages of Scripture into evidence, especially those that are dictated by one who speaks by force of the natural light, in which he surpassed all the wise men of his age, and whose tenets the populace embraced as equally holy[23] as those of the Prophets. I deem it to be Solomon, whose Prophecy and piety are not commended in the sacred books° so much as his prudence and wisdom are.

35 [41] In his Proverbs, he calls the human understanding the source of true life and sets[24] misfortune in foolishness alone.

36 For thus he says in 16:22, **מקור חיים שכל בעליו ומוסר אוילים אולת** *The source of life* (is) *the understanding of its owner's*,[25] *and the comeuppance of fools is foolishness*. Here it is to be noted that in Hebrew, by life absolutely,[26] true life is

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[19] See 4.4.12-13.

[20] Ibid

[21] Or: story

[22] Cf. 4.2.1-4.11.

[23] Lit.: equally holily.

[24] Lit.: constitutes. Likewise in 4.4.37.

[25] "A Hebraism. One who has any thing or contains it in his nature is called the Owner of that thing; thus, a bird in Hebrew is called an Owner of wings, since it has wings. One who understands is an Owner of understanding, since he has understanding." Spinoza's note. "Owner" is capitalized in Spinoza's note, presumably for emphasis, although it is not capitalized in his rendering of the Hebrew citation in the text.

[26] I.e., grammatically, in the absolute (as opposed to the construct) case. Cf. Spinoza, *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*, Ch. 8, beginning. ( *Opera*, I, 311f.; *Hebrew Grammar: A Concise Compendium*, trans. M.J.

understood, as is obvious from Deuteronomy 30:19.

37 He therefore sets the fruit of the understanding in true life alone, and the comeuppance in the deprivation of it alone: this absolutely agrees with what we have noted in the fourth place about the natural divine law.[27] Moreover, that this source of life, or the understanding alone, prescribes laws to the wise, as we have shown as well,[28] is openly taught by this same wise man. For he says {67} in 13:14, **תורת חכם מקור חיים** *The Law of the prudent* (is) *the source of life*, that is, as is obvious from the text just brought up, the understanding.

38 [42] Besides, in 3:13 he teaches in very express words that the understanding renders a human being blessèd and happy, and gives true tranquility of spirit. For thus he says, **אשרי אדם מצא חכמה ובן אדם יפיק תבונה וגו ארך ימים בימינה בשמאלה עשר וכבוד דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום** *Blessèd is the human being who has discovered science, and the son of a human being who has extracted understanding*. The reason is (as vss. 16-17 go on) that *it gives length of days*[29] *directly, riches and honor indirectly. Its ways* (which, no doubt, science indicates) *are charming, and all its paths are peace.*

39 On the basis of Solomon's tenet as well, therefore, the wise alone live with a pacified and steadfast spirit, not as the impious do, whose spirit vacillates with contrary emotions; and so (as Isaiah says too, in 57:20) they have neither peace nor rest.

40 [43] Finally, it is to be noted by us most in these Proverbs of Solomon that what is said in the second chapter is such as to confirm our opinion as clearly as possible. For thus he begins verse 3 of the same chapter **כי אם לבינה תקרא לתבונה תתן קולך וגו אז תבין יראת יהוה ודעת אלהים תמצא כי יהוה יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה** *For if you will cry out for prudence and give your voice to understanding, etc., then you will understand the fear of God and you will discover the science* (or, rather, love; for the verb **ידע** *Yada* signifies these two things) *of God. For* (note well) *God gives wisdom; science and prudence* (emanate) *from his mouth.*[30]

41 [44] By these words he surely indicates very clearly, first, that wisdom or understanding alone teaches us to fear God wisely, that is, to worship by the true religion.

42 Furthermore, he teaches that wisdom and science flow from God's mouth and that God gives them: this we have shown above,[31] namely, that our understanding and our science depend on, arise from, and are perfected solely by the idea of God.

43 [45] He furthermore goes on to teach in very express words, at verse 9, that this science contains the true Ethics and Politics, and that they are deduced from it: **אז תבין צדק ומשפט ומשרים כל מעגל טוב** *Then will you understand Justice and judgment and righteousness* (and) *every good path*; and, not content with these things, he goes on, **כי תבוא חכמה בלבך ודעת לנפשך ינעם מזמה תשמור עליך תבונה**

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Bloom [New York: Philosophical Library, 1962], 39).

[27] See 4.4.11.

[28] Cf. 4.3.5-4.5.

[29] "A Hebraism signifying nothing else but life." Spinoza's note.

[30] Prov. 2:3, 5.

[31] Cf. 4.3.2-5.

תנצרכה *When science enters* **{68}** *into your heart and wisdom is sweet to you, then your providence*[32] *will watch over you, and prudence will guard you.*[33]

44 [46] All these things plainly agree with natural science. For the latter teaches Ethics and true virtue after we have acquired the knowledge of things and tasted the preëminence of science.

45 Therefore, the happiness and tranquility of one who cultivates his natural understanding—according to Solomon's mind as well—depends in the greatest degree not on the imperium of fortune (that is, on God's external help), but on one's own internal virtue (or God's internal help): namely, since by watching, acting, and consulting well, one preserves oneself to the greatest degree.

46 [47] Finally, never to be passed over here is the passage in Paul which is found° in Romans 1:20, where he says as follows (as Tremellius[34] renders it on the basis of the Syriac text): *For from the foundations of the world, the hidden things of God—and his virtue and divinity, which is for eternity—are conspicuous in his creatures through the understanding, so that they are without escape.*

47 [48] In these words, he indicates sufficiently clearly that each understands God's virtue and eternal divinity clearly by the natural light, from which *they*[35] can know and deduce what to seek or what to flee; and so he concludes that all are without escape and cannot be excused by ignorance, which in fact they could be if he were speaking of a light above the natural one and the passion and resurrection of the carnal Christ, etc.

48 [49] And therefore a little below, at verse 24,[36] he goes on as follows: *On this account, God gave them over to the worldly concupiscences of their hearts, etc.*, down to the end of the chapter: in these words, he describes the vices of ignorance and narrates them as the comeuppances for ignorance, as plainly agrees with that Proverb of Solomon's at 16:22 which we have already cited,[37] namely, **ומוסר אוילים אולת** *And the comeuppance of fools is foolishness.*

49 [50] Therefore, no wonder Paul says that evildoers are inexcusable. For just as each one sows, so he reaps: from evils, evils necessarily follow, unless they are corrected wisely; and from[38] good things, good things follow, if steadfastness of spirit accompanies

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[32] "מזמה *mezima* properly signifies thought, deliberation, and vigilance " Spinoza's note

[33] Prov. 2:10.

[34] *Novum Testamentum ex syriaco latinum* (Geneva, 1569), *ad loc*. John Immanuel Tremellius (1510-80), born a Jew in Ferrara, Italy, became a Catholic in 1540, then a Protestant in 1541; he subsequently taught Hebrew at Strasbourg, Cambridge, Heidelberg, and finally Sedan. "Tremellius's greatest work is his translation of the Old and New Testaments into Latin from Hebrew and Syriac respectively. This was long the standard Protestant translation of the Bible. The NT (Syriac text with Latin tr.) appeared in 1569; the OT (Latin tr. only) in 5 parts between 1575 and 1579." (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross [2nd. ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1974], s.v. "Tremellius, John Immanuel.") "When Spinoza cites the New Testament in Latin, he most often takes up Tremellius's translation...." (Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 725, n. 30.; Akkerman also notes Spinoza's deviations from Tremellius, *passim.*)

[35] This word is implicit in Spinoza's Latin; the reference is to *they* (also implicit in Tremellius's Latin) in the last clause of the biblical verse quoted in 4.4.46.

[36] I e., Rom 1:24.

[37] See 4.4.36. Cf. 2.9.28.

[38] Or: on the basis of. (Likewise earlier in 4.4.49.) Cf Glossary, s.v. "on the basis of."

# *CHAPTER 5*

## The Reason why ceremonies were instituted; and faith in histories,[1] namely, for what reason and for whom it is necessary

¶1 {69} In the previous Chapter,[2] we have shown that the divine law that renders human beings truly blessèd and teaches true life is universal for all human beings. Indeed, we have so deduced it from human nature that it is to be figured that it is innate and as it were inscribed in the human mind.

2 [2] Since, however, the ceremonies—those that are found° in the Old Testament, at least—were only instituted for the Hebrews, and moreover were so accommodated to their imperium that for the most part they could not be practiced by anyone away from the society as such, it is certain that they do not pertain to the divine law; and so they do not do anything for blessedness and virtue either. But they have to do solely with the choosing of the Hebrews, that is (by what we have shown in Ch. 3),[3] solely with the temporal happiness of the body and the tranquility of the imperium; and on that account they could only be of any use while their imperium was standing.

3 [3] If in the Old Testament they were referred to as° the law of God, therefore, it was only on account of their having been instituted by revelation, or on revealed foundations.

4 But since even the most solid reason is not worth much among the common Theologians, here I would also like to confirm what we have just shown by the authority of Scripture; and furthermore, for greater transparency, to show for what reason, and how, the ceremonies served to stabilize and preserve the imperium of the Jews.

5 [4] Isaiah does not teach anything more clearly than that the divine law, taken absolutely, signifies the universal law that consists in the plan of true living, and not in ceremonies.

6 For in 1:10 the Prophet calls on his people to hear from him the divine Law, from which he first excludes all kinds of sacrifices and all festivals; and at last he teaches the law itself (see vss. 16-17) and comprehends it in these few things: namely, in purification of the spirit, in the practice[4] or habit of virtue or of good actions, and, finally, in bringing help to the poor.

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[1] Or· stories.

[2] See 4.4.6 , 14-31.

[3] See 3.5.1-11.

[4] Lit.: use.

7 [5] No less enlightening is the attestation of Psalm 40:7, 9; for here the Psalmist addresses God: **זבח ומנחה לא חפצת אזנים כרית לי עולה וחטאה לא שאלת לעשות רצונך אלהי חפצתי ותורתך בתוך מעי** {70} *Sacrifice and tribute you have not wanted; ears you have hollowed out for me; holocaust and sin offering you have not sought. Your will, my God, I have wanted to execute. For your law is in my entrails.*

8 He therefore calls the law of God only the one inscribed in his entrails, or mind, and excludes ceremonies from it. For they are good solely by having been instituted and not by nature; and so they are not inscribed in minds.

9 Besides these, other passages are found in Scripture in addition which attest to the same thing; but it is sufficient to have brought up these two.

10 [6] That ceremonies contribute nothing to blessedness, moreover, but that they only have to do with the temporal happiness of the imperium is established as well from Scripture itself, which promises nothing in return for ceremonies but the advantages and pleasures of the body, and blessedness solely in return for the universal divine law.

11 For in the five books that are vulgarly said to be Moses', nothing else is promised but this temporal happiness, as we have said above,[5] namely, honors or fame, victory, riches, pleasures, and health.

12 [7] And although those five books contain, besides ceremonies, many moral things, still these are not contained in them as universal moral lessons for all human beings, but are mostly accommodated to suit the grasp and mental cast of the Hebrew nation alone; and so they also have to do solely with the utility of the imperium.

13 For example, Moses does not teach the Jews not to kill or steal as a teacher or Prophet, but bids them as a lawgiver or prince. For he does not prove the lessons by reason, but adds a punishment to the biddings: this can and has to vary in accordance with the mental cast of each nation, as experience sufficiently teaches.

14 [8] Thus, the bidding not to commit adultery also has to do solely with the utility of the republic and the imperium. For if he had meant to teach a moral lesson that had to do not only with the utility of the republic but also with tranquility of spirit and each's true blessedness, then he would have condemned not only the external action but also the very consent of the spirit, as Christ did, who only taught universal lessons (see Mt. 5:28); and because of this, Christ promised a spiritual reward, and not a bodily one, as Moses did. [9] For Christ, as I have said,[6] was not sent to preserve the imperium and institute laws, {71} but solely to teach the universal law. And hence we easily understand that Christ hardly repealed the law of Moses, since Christ did not mean to introduce any new laws into the republic and did not care about anything more than teaching moral lessons and distinguishing them from the laws of the Republic—and mostly on account of the ignorance of the Pharisees, who deemed that one lived blessedly by upholding[7] the rights of the Republic or the law of Moses. Yet since, as we have said,[8] the latter has no reason except for the Republic, it

[5] See 5.1.10.

[6] See 4.4.26-28.

[7] Lit.: defending.

[8] See 5.1.12-14.

would not serve to teach the Hebrews, so much as to compel them.

15 [10] But let us return to our point and bring forward into evidence other passages of Scripture which promise nothing in return for ceremonies besides the advantages of the body, and promise blessedness solely in return for the universal divine law.

16 Among the Prophets, no one has taught this more clearly than Isaiah. For in chapter 58, after he has condemned hypocrisy, he commends freedom and charity toward oneself and one's neighbor; and in return for these, he promises these things: **אז יבקע כשחר אורך וארוכתך מהרה תצמח והלך לפניך צדקך כבוד יהוה יאספך** *Then will your light break forth as the dawn, and your health come to flower speedily; and your justice will go before you, and the glory of God will gather you in,*[9] *etc.*[10]

17 After these things, he commends the Sabbath as well; and in return for diligence in observing it, he promises this: **אז תתענג על יהוה והרכבתיך על במותי ארץ והאכלתיך נחלת יעקב אביך כי פי יהוה דבר** *Then you will delight with God,*[11] *and I will make you ride*[12] *on the heights of the earth, and I will make you feed on the heritage of Jacob your father, as the mouth of Jehovah has spoken.*[13]

18 We see, accordingly, that in return for freedom and charity, the Prophet promises a sound mind in a sound body and God's glory even after death—in return for ceremonies, however, nothing but the security of the imperium, prosperity, and the happiness of the body.

19 [11] In Psalms 15 and 24,[14] no mention is made of ceremonies, but only of moral lessons, no doubt since in those Psalms blessedness alone is being dealt with and it alone is being proposed, though yet parabolically. For it is certain there that by the mountain of God, his tent, and the inhabiting of them are to be understood blessedness and tranquility of spirit, and not, in truth, the mountain of Jerusalem or the tabernacle of Moses. {72} For these places were not inhabited by anyone and were not administered except solely by those who were from the tribe of Levi.

20 [12] Besides, all those tenets of Solomon which we have brought up in the previous Chapter[15] also promise true blessedness solely in return for the cultivation of the understanding and of wisdom: namely, that from them the fear of God will be understood and the knowledge[16] of God will be discovered at last.

21 [13] That the Hebrews are not bound to perform ceremonies after the destruction of their imperium, moreover, is plain from Jeremiah, who, when he saw and predicted that the city's[17] sacking was close at hand, said, *God only delights in those who know*

9 "A Hebraism by which is signified the time of death; *to be gathered in to one's people* signifies to die—see Gen. 49:29, 33." Spinoza's note.

10 Is 58:8

11 "It signifies delighting honorably, just as is said in Dutch, too, met Godt / en met eere." Spinoza's note. The Dutch expression means "with God / and with honor."

12 "It signifies holding an imperium, as a horse by the rein." Spinoza's note

13 Is. 58:14

14 Ps. 15:1, 24:3

15 See 4.2.2 and 4 4.34-48. Cf. also 2.9.28.

16 Lit.: science.

17 I.e., Jerusalem's.

*and understand that he exercises compassion, judgment and justice in the world. And so, afterward, only those who recognize these things are to be regarded worthy of praise* (see 9:23), as if to say that God requires nothing special from the Jews after the city's sacking and does not seek anything else from them afterward besides the natural law by which all mortals are bound.

22 [14] Besides, the New Testament plainly confirms this same thing; for only moral lessons are taught in it, as we have said,[18] and a heavenly kingdom is promised in return for them, whereas after the Gospel began to be preached as well to other peoples, who were bound by the jurisdiction of another Republic, the Apostles dismissed the ceremonies. That the Pharisees kept them—or at least a large part of them—after the imperium was lost, they did more in the spirit of opposing the Christians than of pleasing God.

23 [15] For after the city's first sacking—when they were led captive to Babylon—since they were not then divided into sects, that I know of, they at once neglected the ceremonies, indeed, said farewell to the whole law of Moses and handed over the jurisdictions of the fatherland to oblivion as plainly superfluous and began to mix with the other nations—as is established more than sufficiently from Ezra and Nehemiah.[19] Therefore, there is no doubt that, now that their imperium is dissolved, the Jews are no more bound by the law of Moses than before their society and Republic began. For while they lived among other Nations before the exodus from Egypt, they had no peculiar laws and were not bound by any but natural right—and, without a doubt, the right of the Republic in which they were living as well, insofar as it did not conflict with the natural divine law.

24 [16] That the Patriarchs sacrificed to God, moreover, I deem they did more to arouse to devotion their spirit, which had been accustomed to sacrifices from childhood. For all human beings from the time of Enoch were plainly accustomed to sacrifices,[20] {73} so that solely by them were they aroused to devotion in the greatest degree.

25 The Patriarchs therefore sacrificed to God not on the basis of some divine right commanding it, or as having been taught on the basis of the universal foundations of the divine law, but solely on the basis of the custom of that time; and if they did so on the basis of someone's command, that command was none other than the right of the Republic in which they were living, by which they were also bound (as we have already noted here, and also in Ch. 3 when we spoke about Melchizedek).[21]

¶2 [17] With these things, I deem that I have confirmed my tenet by the authority of Scripture. It is now left to show how, and for what reason, ceremonies served to preserve and stabilize the imperium of the Hebrews: this I will show from universal foundations in the fewest words° I can.

2 [18] Society is very useful, and also very necessary, not only for living secure from enemies, but also for economizing in many matters. For unless human beings wanted to give cooperation to one another, they would lack both art and time to

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[18] See 5.1 14.

[19] Ezra 4:13, 20, 5:3, 9-17, 7:12-26, 9:1-10:44, Neh. 7:4-5, 8:1-10:40, 13:1-30

[20] Gen. 4:17 with 4:3.

[21] See, respectively, 5 1 23 and 3.5 7-9.

sustain and preserve themselves as much as they can.

3 [19] For not all are equally capable of all things, and each would not be competent to get what he needs most alone.

4 Strength and time, I say, would be lacking to each if he had to plow, sow, reap, grind, cook, weave, sew, and do very many other things effectively[22] for sustaining life—to say nothing of the arts and sciences, which are highly necessary as well for the perfection of human nature and its blessedness.

5 [20] For we see that those who live barbarically without a polity lead a miserable and almost bestial life; and still they do not get those few poor and unrefined things without cooperation, such as it may be.

6 Now if human beings were so constituted by nature as to long for nothing except what true reason indicates, surely society would need no laws; but it would be absolutely sufficient for human beings to teach true moral lessons, that they might do spontaneously what is truly useful in a full and liberal spirit.

7 [21] But human nature is constituted quite otherwise. All do seek what is useful to them, yet hardly on the basis of the dictate of sound reason; but they most often desire things and judge them useful solely on the basis of lust and the emotions of a broken spirit (which take no account of future times and other matters).

8 [22] Hence it comes about that no society {**74**} can subsist without an imperium, force, and consequently laws that moderate and curb the lust and unbridled impulse of human beings. Still, human nature does not abide being simply compelled; and as Seneca the Tragedian says, no one holds a repressive imperium together for long.[23] Moderate ones last. For, as long as human beings act solely on the basis of dread, they do what they mostly do not want to, and they do not take into account the utility or necessity of what is to be done, but care only about not being guilty of a capital crime°[24] or liable° for a comeuppance.

9 Indeed, they cannot help rejoicing at evil or harm to a commander[25] and longing for him to have every evil and bringing it on him whenever they can, even though it comes with great evil to themselves as well.

10 Furthermore, least of all can human beings abide serving their equals and being regulated by them.

11 Finally, nothing is more difficult than to take freedom away from human beings again, once it has been granted.

12 [23] From these things it follows: First, either the whole society has to hold the imperium collectively, if it can be done, so that all are bound to themselves and no one is bound to serve his equal; or, if a few or one alone holds the imperium, he has to have something above the common human nature, or at least endeavor with the utmost strength to persuade the vulgar of it.

13 [24] Furthermore, laws in any imperium have to be so instituted that human beings are restrained not so much by dread as by the hope of some good that they

[22] Lit.: effect many other things.

[23] Seneca, *Troads* 258-59.

[24] Lit.: of death.

[25] See Glossary, s.v., "imperium."

long for very much.[26] For in this mode each will long to do his duty.

14 [25] Finally, since obedience consists in someone's executing commands solely on the basis of the authority of the one° commanding, hence it follows that obedience has no place in a society whose imperium is in the possession of all and whose laws are sanctioned on the basis of common consent; and whether the laws in such a society are enlarged or diminished, the populace nevertheless remains equally free, since they act not on the basis of another's authority, but on the basis of their own[27] consent.

15 Yet the opposite happens when one alone holds the imperium absolutely. For all execute the commands of the imperium solely on the basis of the authority of the one; and so, unless they are so educated from the beginning as to depend on the mouth of the one° commanding, it will be difficult to institute new laws when there is a need to, and to take freedom away once it has been granted to the populace.

¶3 [26] These things thus having been considered universally, let us descend to the republic of the Hebrews.

2 When they first came out of Egypt, they were no longer bound by the jurisdiction of another nation; and so they were permitted to sanction new laws {75} at their discretion, or to constitute new jurisdictions and hold an imperium in any place they wanted and occupy the lands they wanted.

3 [27] Still, there was nothing they were less capable of than constituting jurisdictions wisely and retaining the imperium in their possession collectively. They were all of a more or less crude mental cast, and done in by a miserable slavery.

4 The imperium, therefore, had to have remained in the possession of only one, who would command the others and compel them by force and who, finally, would prescribe laws and afterward interpret them.

5 [28] Moses could retain this imperium easily, moreover, since he excelled the others in divine virtue, and persuaded the populace and showed them by many attestations that he had it (see Ex. 14, last verse,[28] and 19:9). With the divine virtue in which he was skilled, he consitituted jurisdictions and enjoined the populace accordingly. Yet in these matters he took the utmost care that the populace did their duty not so much in dread as spontaneously. These two things compelled him to do so most: the stubborn mental cast of the populace (which does not abide being compelled by force alone) and the imminence of war. Here, for things to turn out favorably, it is necessary to exhort soldiers rather than terrify them with punishments and threats. For thus each is more eager to win a reputation for virtue and magnanimity of spirit than only to avoid a comeuppance.

6 [29] Because of this, therefore, Moses, by virtue and divine bidding, introduced religion into the Republic, so that the populace would do their duty not so much on the basis of dread as on that of devotion.[29]

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[26] Cf Terence, *Brothers* 57-58.

[27] Or: proper.

[28] Ex. 14:31

[29] Cf Terence, *Brothers* 74-75

7 Furthermore, he obligated them by benefits, and promised them by divination[30] many things in the future, and did not sanction laws too severe, as anyone who has studied them easily grants us, especially if he pays attention to the details that were required for anyone guilty to be condemned.[31]

8 [30] Finally, so that the populace, which could not function[32] in their own right, would depend on the mouth of the one° commanding, he let the human beings, accustomed as they were to slavery, do nothing at their discretion. For the populace could do nothing without at the same time being bound to recall the law and execute commands that depended solely on the decision of the one° commanding. For they were not permitted to plow, sow, and reap at their discretion, but in accordance with the certain and determinate bidding of the law;[33] likewise, they were not permitted to eat, drink, shave the head or beard,[34] or rejoice, or do absolutely anything except in accordance with the biddings and commands prescribed in the laws;[35] and not only that, but they were also bound to have certain signs on doorposts and hands and between the eyes, which admonished them {76} to obedience always.[36]

9 [31] This, therefore, was the goal of the ceremonies: for human beings to do nothing at all on the basis of their own decree, but everything on the basis of another's command, and to confess by continual actions and meditations that they were nothing in their own right but were altogether part° of another's. From all these things, it is more clearly established than light that ceremonies do nothing for blessedness; and those of the Old Testament—indeed, the whole law of Moses—did not have to do with anything besides the imperium of the Hebrews and, consequently, the advantages of the body.

10 [32] This pertains, moreover, to the ceremonies of Christians, namely Baptism, the Lord's Supper, festivals, outward prayers, and any others that still are and always have been common to the whole of Christianity: if they were ever instituted by Christ or by the Apostles (which is not yet sufficiently established for me), they were only instituted as signs of the universal Church, and not as things that do anything for blessedness or have any Holiness in them. [33] Therefore, although it was not for the reason of the imperium, still these ceremonies were only instituted by reason of the full Society. And so, one who lives alone is hardly bound by them. Indeed, one who lives in an imperium where the Christian religion is forbidden is bound to abstain from these ceremonies, and nevertheless will be able to live blessedly.

11 [34] An example of this matter is found° in the kingdom of the Japanese, where the Christian religion is forbidden and the Dutch who dwell there are bound to abstain from all outward worship on the basis of a command of the East India Company. I do not deem that I need° to confirm this now by another authority. And although it

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[30] Lit : divinely.

[31] Num 35:30, Dt. 17:6, 19:15-21.

[32] Lit.: be

[33] Dt. 22.9-10 (plowing and sowing), Lev.19:9-10 (reaping).

[34] Lev. 11 (eating), 19:27 (shaving).

[35] Lev. 19 and 23 *passim*. Cf. 17.12.19-21.

[36] Dt. 6:9, 11:20 (doorposts); Ex 13:9, 16, Dt. 6:8, 11 (hands and foreheads).

would not be difficult to deduce this same thing on the basis of the foundations of the New Testament as well, and perhaps show it by clear attestations in addition, still I am bypassing these things instead, since my psyche hastens to other things.

12 I go on accordingly to what I set out to deal with in the second place in this Chapter:[37] for whom and for what reason a faith in the histories[38] that are contained in the Sacred Books° is necessary. And so that this may be investigated by the natural light, it seems that it is to be gone about as follows.

¶4 [35] If anyone wants to urge or dissuade human beings of anything that is not self-evident, for them to embrace it, he has to deduce his point on the basis of things taken for granted, and convince them by experience or else by reason—namely, on the basis of matters that they have experienced through the senses as happening in nature, or else on the basis of self-evident intellectual axioms.[39] Yet if the experience is not such as to be understood clearly and distinctly, although it may convince the human being, {77} it still will not be able to affect the understanding and dissipate its clouds so well as when the thing to be taught is deduced on the basis of intellectual axioms alone, that is, by virtue of the understanding alone and in perceiving the matter in order—especially if the question is about a spiritual matter that does not fall under the senses in any mode.

2 [36] But since for deducing things on the basis of intellectual notions alone, a long chain of perceptions is very often required—and, besides, the utmost caution, clarity[40] of intellect,[41] and the utmost continence as well, all of which are rarely found in human beings—therefore human beings prefer to be taught by experience than to deduce all their perceptions on the basis of a few axioms and chain them together with one another. [37] Hence it follows that if anyone wants to teach some teaching to a full nation, not to say the human race as such, and to be understood by everyone in everything, he is bound to confirm his point by experience alone, and mostly accommodate his reasons and the definitions of the things to be taught to suit the grasp of the plebs, which comprises the greatest part of the human race, and not chain them together or hand down definitions such as serve for chaining the reasons together better. Otherwise he will only be writing for the learnèd; that is, he will only be able to be understood by very few human beings, as compared to the rest.

3 [38] Accordingly, since Scripture as such was first revealed for the use[42] of a full nation, and ultimately for that of the human race as such, what is contained in it necessarily has to have been mostly accommodated to suit the grasp of the plebs and to be proved by experience alone.

4 Let us explain the matter more clearly.

5 What Scripture means to teach which has to do with theory alone is mainly this:

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[37] See 4.4.12.

[38] Or: stories.

[39] For examples of the latter, see Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. I, Ax. 1-8; Pt. II, Ax. 1-5; *ibid.*, Lem. 3, Ax. 1-3; Pt. IV, Ax.; Pt. V, Ax. 1-2.

[40] Lit.: transparency.

[41] See Glossary, s.v. "mental cast."

[42] Or: conduct.

namely, there exists[43] a God, or a being that has made everything, has directed and sustained it with the utmost wisdom, and takes the utmost care of human beings, namely, those who live piously and honestly. The rest, however, he punishes with many comeuppances, and separates from the good ones.

6 [39] Yet these things Scripture proves by experience alone, namely, by the histories[44] that it narrates; and it does not hand down any definitions of these things, but accommodates all words and reasons to suit the grasp of the plebs.

7 And although experience cannot give any clear knowledge of these things, or teach what God is and by what plan he sustains and directs all things and cares for human beings, it can still teach and enlighten human beings as much as is sufficient for impressing obedience {78} and devotion in their spirits.

8 [40] Yet from this, I deem that it is established sufficiently clearly for whom and for what reason a faith in the histories contained in the Sacred Books° is necessary. For, from what has just been shown, it follows very evidently that acquaintance with and faith in them are extremely necessary for the vulgar, whose intellect does not avail for perceiving things clearly and distinctly.

9 Furthermore, one who denies them is impious, since he does not believe that there is a God and that he provides for things and for human beings. One who is ignorant of them and nevertheless recognizes by the natural light that there is a God and what we have said besides, and furthermore has the true plan of living, is altogether blessèd; indeed, he is more blessèd than the vulgar, since besides true opinions he has in addition a clear and distinct concept. [41] Finally, it follows that one who is ignorant of these histories of Scripture and has not come to know anything of the natural light, if he is not impious or stubborn, is yet inhuman and almost a beast, and has no gift of God.

10 But here it is to be noted that when we say that acquaintance with histories is highly necessary for the vulgar, we do not mean acquaintance with any and all of the histories that are contained in Sacred Writ, but only with those that are the chief ones and which alone, without the rest, show the teaching that we have just mentioned very plainly, and can move the psyches of human beings most.

11 [42] For if all the histories of Scripture were necessary for proving its teaching, and no conclusion could be elicited except on the basis of the universal consideration of any and all of the histories that are contained in it, then surely the demonstration and conclusion of its teaching would surpass not only the grasp of the plebs, but human grasp and strength absolutely. For who could pay attention to so large a number of histories at the same time, or to so many details and parts of the teaching which have to be elicited on the basis of so many and such different histories?

12 [43] I, at least, cannot persuade myself that those human beings who have left us Scripture as we have it abounded in such intellect as to have been able to investigate such a demonstration, and much less that the teaching of Scripture could not be understood without having heard of the quarrels of Isaac,[45] the counsels of Achitophel

[43] Lit.: is given.

[44] Or: stories. Likewise throughout 5 4.8-18 .

[45] Gen 26:12-33.

given to Absalom,[46] or the civil war of the Judeans[47] and the Israelites,[48] and other Chronicles in this mode. Or that this teaching could not be demonstrated from histories just as easily to the first Jews who lived at the time of Moses, {79} as to those who lived at the time of Ezra.

13 But about these things, see° more extensively in the following.[49]

14 [44] Accordingly, the vulgar are only bound to know those histories that can move their psyches most to obedience and devotion.

15 Yet the vulgar themselves are not sufficiently capable of making a judgment about these things, inasmuch as they delight more in the narratives and in the specific and unexpected outcome of events than in the teaching of the histories itself. Yet because of this, besides a reading of the histories, they need in addition Pastors or ministers of the Church to teach them with a view to the weakness of their intellect.

16 [45] Still, let us not wander from our point, but let us conclude what we were chiefly aiming to show, namely, that a faith in histories, whatever they may ultimately be, does not pertain to the divine law or render human beings per se more blessèd, or have any other utility except by reason of the teaching: for this reason alone, some histories can be more outstanding than others.

17 [46] The narratives contained in the Old and New Testament are therefore more outstanding than other, profane ones; and even among themselves, some of them are more outstanding than others, for the reason of the salutary opinions that follow from them.

18 Therefore, if someone were to read the histories in Sacred Scripture and have faith in everything in it, and still did not pay attention to the teaching that it aims to teach by them and did not improve his° life, it is for him just as if he had read the Koran or the Dramatic fables of the Poets or even the common Chronicles with the attention with which the vulgar usually do. And on the contrary, as we have said,[50] one who is plainly ignorant of them and nevertheless has salutary opinions and the true plan of living, is absolutely blessèd and really has Christ's Spirit in him.

19 [47] Yet the Jews plainly feel to the contrary. For they state that true opinions and the true plan of living contribute nothing to blessedness, so long as human beings embrace them by the natural light alone and not as lessons revealed prophetically to Moses. For Maimonides dares to affirm this openly in these words in *Laws of Kings* 8.11, **כל המקבל שבע מצות ונזהר לעשותן הרי זה מחסידי אומות העולם ויש לו חלק לעולם הבא: והוא שיקבל אותן ויעשה אותן מפני שצוה בהן הקדוש ברוך הוא בתורה והודיענו על ידי משה רבינו שבני נח מקודם נצתוו בהן אבל אם עשהן מפני הכרע הדעת אין זה גר תושב ואינו מחסידי אומות העולם ואינו מחכמיהם** *Everyone who takes up for himself the seven precepts*[51] {80} *and has executed them diligently, is*

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[46] II Sam. 16 20-17:23.

[47] The noun *Judaei* has been translated "Judeans" in this sentence, and "Jews" in the next. Cf. Glossary, s v. "Hebrews "

[48] E g , I Ki 12:1-33, 15:6, 16-32

[49] See Ch. 13.

[50] See 5.4 9

[51] "N B. The Jews deem that God gave seven precepts to Noah and that all nations are bound by them alone: to the

*among the pious of the Nations, and heir to the future world, viz., if he takes them up and has followed them on account of the fact that God has enjoined them in the law and has revealed to us through Moses that they have been enjoined beforehand to the children of Noah; but if he has executed them as one who is led by reason, he is not a denizen and is neither of the pious nor of the knowledgable of the Nations.*

20 [48] These are Maimonides' words, to which Rabbi Joseph, son of Shem Tov, in the book of his which he calls *Kevod Elohim*, or *The Glory of God*,[52] adds that even though Aristotle (whom he deems to have written the best Ethics, and regards above everyone) has omitted none of the things that have to do with true Ethics and none of the things that Shem Tov embraces in his own Ethics as well, but has executed everything diligently, it still cannot contribute to one's salvation, since what he teaches he has embraced not as divine lessons revealed prophetically, but solely by the dictate of reason.

21 [49] But I figure it is sufficiently established to anyone who reads all these things attentively that they are mere fantasies and are not supported by any reasons, nor by the authority of Scripture; therefore, to refute this matter, it is sufficient to have recounted it. And I do not have it in my psyche here to refute the tenet of those who state, no doubt, that the natural light cannot teach anything sound about the things that have to do with true salvation either. For those who do not grant themselves any sound reason cannot prove this by any sound reason either. And if they pass it off that they have something above reason, it is a mere fantasy and far below reason, as their common mode of living has already sufficiently indicated.

22 But there is no need to speak of these things more openly.

23 [50] Let me add only this: we cannot know anyone except by his works. One who accordingly is abundant in these—charity, gladness, peace, forbearance, gentleness, goodness, faith, mildness, and continence—against which (as Paul says in Gal. 5:22) no law is set down, is really taught by God and is altogether blessèd, whether he is taught by reason alone or by Scripture alone.

24 With these things, I have accordingly discharged everything I had set out to deal with concerning the divine law.

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Hebrew nation° alone, however, he gave very many others so as to make it more blessèd than the rest." Spinoza's note Cf. Gen. 9:1-7

52 Joseph ben Shem Tov, *Kevod Elohim*, second-last page, in *Shem Tob ben Shem Tob, 'Sefer Ha-Emunot' and Joseph ben Shem Tob, 'Kebod Elohim'* (Ferrara, 1556; reprint; Farnborough, England: Gregg International, 1969).

# CHAPTER 6

## Miracles

¶1 {**81**} Just as human beings are accustomed to calling the knowledge[1] that surpasses human grasp divine, so they are accustomed to calling a work whose cause the vulgar are ignorant of, divine, or God's work. For the vulgar deem that God's power and providence are established as clearly as possible when they see something happening in nature which is unusual and contrary to the opinion they have of nature from custom, especially if it turns out to their profit or advantage. And they figure God's existence cannot be proved from anything more clearly than from the fact that nature, as they deem, does not keep its order. And on that account, they deem that all those who explain things—and miracles—through natural causes, or are eager[2] to understand them, are removing God, or at least God's providence. [2] They figure God does nothing whenever nature acts in its usual order, and that, on the other hand, the power of nature and natural causes are suspended whenever God does act. Accordingly, they imagine two powers distinct in number from each other—the power of God, and the power of natural things which yet is determined or (as many feel, especially in today's time) created by God in a certain mode.

2 [3] What they understand by either power°, however—and what by God and nature—surely they do not know, unless they imagine God's power as the imperium of some Royal majesty, and nature's as a force and impulse.

3 The vulgar accordingly call unusual works of nature miracles, or works of God; and partly out of devotion, partly out of a longing to oppose those who cultivate the natural sciences, they long not to know the natural causes of things, and yearn to hear only what they are most ignorant of, and what they most admire[3] on that account.

4 [4] Viz., since they can only pray to God, and refer everything to his imperium and will, for no other reason except by denying natural causes and imagining things outside the order of nature; and they do not admire God's power more than while imagining the power of nature as if it were being subdued by God.

5 This seems to have had its origin from the first Jews, who narrated their miracles so as to convince the Heathens of their time, who prayed to visible Gods—viz., Sun, Moon, Earth, Water, Air, etc.—and to show them that those Gods {**82**} were weak and unsteadfast, or changeable, and under the imperium of an invisible God; by the miracles, the Jews endeavored to show in addition that the whole of nature was being

[1] Lit.: science. Cf. 1.18.6.
[2] Or: study how.
[3] Or: wonder at. Similarly in 6.1.4, Cf. 6.1.18.

directed only for their advantage by the imperium of the God whom they prayed to: this has been so pleasing to human beings that they have not stopped fantasizing miracles down to this time, so that they themselves might be believed to be more cherished by God than the rest, and the final cause on account of which God has created and continually directs everything.

6 [5] What does the foolishness of the vulgar not arrogate to itself, in not having any sound concept either of God or of nature, in confusing God's wishes with those of human beings and, finally, in fantasizing that nature is so limited that they believe a human being is its chief part!

7 With these things, I have narrated at sufficient length the opinions and prejudices of the vulgar concerning Nature and miracles. [6] Still, to teach the matter in order, I will show: First, nothing happens contrary to nature, but it keeps an eternal, fixed, and unchangeable order; and, meanwhile, what is to be understood by a miracle.[4]

8 Second, from miracles we can know neither the existence nor the essence nor, consequently, the providence of God; but all these can be perceived far better from the fixed and unchangeable order of nature.[5]

9 Third, I will show, from a few examples of Scripture, that Scripture itself understands nothing else by God's decrees and volitions—and, consequently, providence—but the very order of nature, which follows necessarily from its eternal laws.[6]

10 Fourth, finally, I will deal with the mode of interpreting the miracles of Scripture and with what chiefly has to be noted concerning the narratives of the miracles.[7]

11 And these are the chief things that have to do with the argument of this Chapter and which, I figure, serve the intent of this whole work in no small way° besides.

12 [7] As for what touches on the first thing, it is easily shown on the basis of the things we have demonstrated in Chapter 4 about the divine law.[8] Namely, everything that God wants, or determines, involves eternal necessity and truth. [8] For we have shown,[9] on the basis of the fact that God's understanding is not distinguished from God's will, that when we say God wants something, we are affirming the same as when we say God understands it. Therefore, by the same necessity by which it follows on the basis of the divine nature and perfection that God understands that something is, it follows that God wants it to be.

13 [9] Since, however, nothing is necessarily true except solely on the basis of the divine decree, hence it very clearly follows that the universal laws of nature {83} are merely the decrees of God, which follow on the basis of the necessity and perfection of the divine nature.

14 If anything were to happen in nature which conflicted with its universal laws, therefore, it would necessarily be opposed to the divine decree, understanding, and

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[4] See 6 1 12-19.

[5] See 6 1 20-46.

[6] See 6 1.47-67.

[7] See 6 1.68-102.

[8] See 4 4.12, 14-31

[9] See 4 4 14-16

nature as well. Or if anyone were to state that God did anything contrary to the laws of nature, he would at the same time be compelled to state that God acts contrary to his own nature: nothing is more absurd than this.

15 The same thing can easily be shown as well on the basis of the fact that the power of nature is, no doubt, the divine power and virtue itself. The divine power, however, is God's very essence; but I would rather omit this for the present.[10]

16 [10] Nothing comes about in nature,[11] therefore, which conflicts with its universal laws. Nor yet is there anything that does not agree with them or follow from them. For whatever comes about, comes about through God's will and eternal decree: that is, as we have already shown,[12] whatever comes about, comes about in accordance with laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth. [11] Nature, accordingly, always observes laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth, although not all are recognized by us; and even so, it observes a fixed and unchangeable order as well. Nor does any sound reason urge attributing a limited power and virtue to nature, or stating that its laws are only capable of certain things, not of all things. For, since the virtue and power of nature are the very virtue and power of God, and the laws and rules of nature are the very decrees of God, it is altogether to be believed that the power of nature is infinite and that its laws are so wide as to extend to all things that are conceived by the divine understanding itself. [12] For otherwise what else is being stated[13] than that God created a nature so impotent and established such sterile laws and rules for it that he is often compelled to reinforce it anew if he wants it to be preserved and that things succeed one another° on the basis of prayer: this, I figure, is very alien to sound reason.

17 [13] From these things, accordingly—that nothing happens in nature which does not follow on the basis of its laws and that its laws extend to all things that are also conceived by the Divine understanding itself and, finally, that nature keeps a fixed and unchangeable order—it very clearly follows that the noun "miracle" cannot be understood except with respect to the opinions of human beings, and signifies nothing else **{84}** but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain on the model of some other, usual thing; or, at least, that the one who writes or narrates the miracle cannot so explain it.

18 [14] I could indeed say that a miracle is something whose cause is unable to be explained on the basis of the principles of natural things as recognized by the natural light. But since miracles were made to suit the grasp of the vulgar, who were plainly ignorant of the principles of natural things, it is certain that the ancients considered as a miracle what they could not explain in the mode in which the vulgar are used to explaining natural things—by having recourse to memory so as to recall another, similar thing that they are used to imagining without wonderment. For the vulgar

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[10] Cf. 6.1.20-34.

[11] "N.B. I do not understand by nature here only matter and its dispositions, but infinite other things besides matter." Spinoza's note. ("Matter" here is *materia*, rather than *res*.)

[12] See 4.4.14-16.

[13] Or: established. The same verb occurs in the following clause.

figure they understand a thing sufficiently when they do not wonder at it.[14]

19 [15] The ancients, and almost all down to this time, accordingly had no norm for a miracle besides this. Therefore, it is not to be doubted that in Sacred Writ many things are narrated as miracles whose causes can easily be explained on the basis of the recognized principles of natural things, as we have already hinted above in Chapter 2,[15] when we spoke of the sun's having stood still at the time of Joshua and gone backward at the time of Ahaz. But we will soon deal with these things at more length—namely, in connection with the interpretation of miracles, which I have promised to deal with in this Chapter.[16]

20 [16] It is now time for me here to go over to the second thing[17]—namely, to show that on the basis of miracles we cannot understand God's essence or existence or providence; but on the contrary, these can be perceived far better on the basis of the fixed and unchangeable order of nature. To demonstrate this, I proceed as follows.

21 [17] Since God's existence is not self-evident,[18] it necessarily has to be concluded on the basis of notions whose truth is so firm and unshakeable that no power can be given or conceived by which they can be changed. For us, at least from the time we conclude God's existence on the basis of them, they have to appear so, if we want to conclude it beyond any shadow of doubt. For if we could conceive that those notions can be changed by some power, whatever it might ultimately be, then we might doubt their truth and, consequently, our conclusion as well—namely, God's existence—and we will never be able to be certain of anything.

22 [18] Furthermore, we know that nothing agrees with nature or conflicts with it except what we have shown agrees or conflicts with those principles. Therefore, if we could conceive that something in nature could come about by some power **{85}** (whatever it might ultimately be) which conflicts with nature, it will conflict with those first notions; and so it is to be rejected as absurd, or else (as we have just shown)[19] the first notions—and consequently God and all things—are to be doubted, however they might have been perceived.

23 [19] Therefore, miracles—insofar as by this is understood a work that conflicts with the order of nature—are far from showing us God's existence, since on the contrary miracles would make us doubt it when we could be absolutely certain of it without them—namely, when we know that everything in nature follows a certain and unchangeable order.

24 [20] Yet let it be posited that a miracle is what cannot be explained through natural causes; this can be understood in two modes: either it has natural causes that nevertheless cannot be investigated by human understanding, or, it admits of[20] no cause except God or God's will. [21] But since everything that happens through

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[14] Or perhaps: admire. Similarly, "wonderment" in the previous clause is also "admiration." Cf. 6.1.3-4.

[15] See 2.8 3-8.

[16] See 6 1.73-102, with 6.1.10.

[17] See 6 1 8.

[18] "Cf. Annotation 6." Spinoza's note

[19] See 6.1.21.

[20] Lit.. acknowledges.

natural causes also happens solely on the basis of God's power and will, it is ultimately necessary to arrive at this: namely, whether a miracle has natural causes or not, it is a work that surpasses human grasp. But from a work that surpasses our grasp—and especially from that—we cannot understand anything.

25 For whatever we clearly and distinctly understand has to become known to us through itself,[21] or through something else that we clearly and distinctly understand through itself.

26 [22] Therefore, from a miracle, or a work that surpasses our grasp, we cannot understand God's essence or existence, or absolutely anything of God and nature; but, on the contrary, since we know that everything is determined and sanctioned by God and that the operations of nature follow from God's essence—indeed, that nature's laws are in truth God's eternal decrees and volitions—it is absolutely to be concluded that we know God and God's will better, the better we know natural things and the more clearly we understand how they depend on their first cause and how they operate in accordance with the eternal laws of nature.

27 [23] Therefore, those works that we clearly and distinctly understand by reason of our own understanding are to be called God's works and are to be referred to as° God's will by a far better right than those of which we are plainly ignorant although they strongly occupy the imagination and carry human beings away in admiration. Inasmuch as only those works of nature which {86} we clearly and distinctly understand render knowledge of God grander, and indicate as clearly as possible God's will and decrees, therefore those who have recourse to God's will when they are ignorant of a thing are plainly trifling. Surely it is a ridiculous mode of professing one's ignorance.

28 [24] Besides, although we could conclude something on the basis of miracles, God's existence still could not be concluded from them in any mode.

29 For, since a miracle is a limited work and never expresses anything but a certain limited power, it is certain that on the basis of such an effect we cannot conclude the existence of a cause whose power is infinite, but, at the utmost, a cause whose power is greater. I say at the utmost, for on the basis of many causes running together, a work can follow whose force and power would be less than the power of all the causes together, yet far greater then the power of each cause.

30 [25] Yet since nature's laws (as we have already shown)[22] extend to infinite things and are conceived by us under some show of eternity,[23] and nature, in accordance with them, proceeds in a certain and unchangeable order, to that extent they indicate to us God's infinity, eternity, and unchangeability in some mode.

31 [26] We accordingly conclude that we cannot know God or his existence and providence through miracles; but those things are concluded far better on the basis of the fixed and unchangeable order of nature.

32 In this conclusion, I am speaking of a miracle insofar as nothing else is understood by it but a work that surpasses or is believed to surpass the grasp of

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[21] See note on "self-evident" at 4.4.7.

[22] See 6.1.16.

[23] The Latin is *sub ... specie aeternitatis*. Spinoza equates "eternity" with "necessity" in *Ethics*, Pt. I, Prop 11, Scholium.

human beings. For, insofar as it is supposed to destroy or interrupt the order of nature or conflicts with its laws, to that extent (as we have just shown)[24] not only can it not give any knowledge of God, but on the contrary it would take away the knowledge we have naturally and would make us doubt God and all things.

33 [27] Nor do I acknowledge any difference here between a work contrary to nature and a work above nature (that is, as some say, a work that does not conflict with nature and yet cannot be produced or effected by it). For—since a miracle does not come about outside nature but in nature itself—although it may be set above nature, it is still necessary for it to interrupt nature's order, which we otherwise conceive as fixed and unchangeable on the basis of God's decrees.

34 [28] If something were to come about in nature which did not follow on the basis of its laws, therefore, it would necessarily conflict with the order that God has set in nature for eternity {87} through the universal laws of nature; and so it would be contrary to nature and its laws; and, consequently, faith in it would make us doubt everything and lead us to Atheism.

35 [29] And with these things, I deem that I have shown on the basis of sufficiently firm reasons what I was aiming at in the Second place:[25] on the basis of these, we can conclude anew that a miracle, whether contrary to nature or above nature, is a mere absurdity. And on that account, nothing else can be understood by miracle in Sacred Writ but, as we have said,[26] a work of nature that surpasses, or is believed to surpass, the grasp of human beings.

36 [30] Now before I go on to the third thing, I would like to confirm this tenet of ours by the authority of Scripture—namely, that we cannot know God from miracles. And although Scripture nowhere teaches this plainly, it can still be easily concluded from it—primarily from the fact that Moses (in Dt. 13) enjoins condemning a seducing Prophet to death, even if he were to make miracles. [31] For thus he says: **ובא האות והמופת אשר דבר אליך: לא תשמע אל דברי הנביא ההוא וגו כי מנסה יהוה אלהיכם אתכם וגו והנביא ההוא יומת וגו** *And* (although) *the sign and portent were to happen which he has predicted to you, etc.,* (still) *do not assent to the words of its Prophet, etc., since the Lord your God is tempting you, etc. That Prophet will* (therefore) *be condemned to death, etc.*[27]

37 From these things, it clearly follows that miracles can also be made by false Prophets; and unless human beings are thoroughly fortified by the true knowledge and love of God, they can embrace false Gods on the basis of miracles equally easily as they can° the True one.

38 For he adds, **כי מנסה יהוה אלהיכם אתכם וגו** *since Jehovah your God is tempting you, that he might know whether you love him with your entire heart and your entire ° spirit.*[28]

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[24] See 6.1.20-31

[25] See 6.1 8.

[26] See 6.1 32

[27] Dt. 13:2-3, 5.

[28] Dt. 13:3. The words *that he might know whether you love him with your entire heart and your entire ° spirit* are supplied by Spinoza where the Hebrew he has quoted reads *etc.*

39 [32] Furthermore, on the basis of so many miracles, the Israelites could not form any sound concept of God—as experience itself has testified. For when they persuaded themselves that Moses had departed from them, they sought visible deities from Aaron, and a cow—for shame!—was their idea of God which they ultimately formed on the basis of so many miracles.[29]

40 [32] Although Asaph had heard of so many miracles, he still doubted God's providence, and would almost have deviated from the true way, if he had not ultimately understood true blessedness (see Ps. 73).

41 Solomon too, in whose time the affairs of the Jews were in the utmost vigor, suspected that everything happens by chance.

42 See Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 and 9:2-3, etc.

43 [34] Finally, this same matter was rather obscure to almost all the Prophets: **{88}** namely, how the order of nature and the outcome for human beings could agree with the concept they had formed of God's providence; still, it was always quite clear to Philosophers, who endeavor to understand things not on the basis of miracles but on the basis of clear concepts—to those, no doubt, who set[30] true happiness in virtue and tranquility of spirit alone, and are not eager for nature to obey them but for themselves to obey nature[31]—inasmuch as they know for certain that God directs nature as his universal laws require and not as the particular laws of human beings require, and thus that God has a plan not for the human race alone but for the whole of nature.

44 [35] Accordingly, it is also established on the basis of Scripture itself that miracles do not give true knowledge of God; nor do they teach God's providence clearly.

45 What is often found in Scripture, however, is that God made portents so as to become known to human beings, as God in Exodus 10:2 toyed with the Egyptians and gave signs of himself so that the Israelites might know that he was God: it still does not follow from this that the miracles really taught that; but it only follows that the Jews had such opinions that they could easily be convinced by those miracles. [36] For we have clearly shown above, in Chapter 2,[32] that the Prophetic reasons, or those that are formed on the basis of revelation, are not elicited on the basis of universal and common notions, but on the basis of things taken for granted,[33] however absurd, and the opinions of those to whom the matters are revealed, or whom the Holy Spirit wants to convince: this we have illustrated by many examples and by the attestation of Paul as well, who was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.[34]

46 [37] But although those miracles could convince the Egyptians and the Jews on the basis of what had been granted by them, they still could not give them° the true idea and knowledge of God, but could only make them grant that there existed[35] a

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[29] Ex. 32:8.

[30] Lit.. constitute.

[31] Or: and do not study how nature might obey them, but how they might obey nature.

[32] See 2.5.1-10.1.

[33] See note on *ex concessis* at 5.4.1

[34] I Cor. 9:20. Cf. 2.9.33-34, 3.5.44-50.

[35] Lit.: was given.

Deity more powerful than all of the things recognized by them; that, furthermore, he cared above all for the Hebrews, for whom at that time everything turned out very happily, exceeding their hope; and not that God cared equally for all. For Philosophy alone teaches the latter. [38] Therefore, the Jews, and all who have not known God's providence except on the basis of the dissimilar states of human affairs and the unequal fortunes of human beings, have persuaded themselves that the Jews have been more cherished than the rest even though they did not surpass the rest in true human perfection, as we have already shown in Chapter 3.[36]

47 [39] I therefore go on to the Third thing[37]—to {89} show on the basis of Scripture that God's decrees and commands, and consequently providence, are really nothing besides the order of nature; that is, when Scripture says that this or that was done by God or God's will, it understands nothing else but that it was done in accordance with the laws and order of nature, and not, as the vulgar opine, that nature meanwhile stopped acting or that its order was temporarily interrupted.

48 [40] Yet Scripture does not directly teach those things that do not have to do with its teaching, since it is not part° of it to teach matters through natural causes, or merely theoretical matters (as we have already shown concerning the divine law).[38] Therefore, what we mean here is to be elicited by implication[39] on the basis of some of the Histories[40] in Scripture which are by chance narrated at more length and with more details. I will accordingly bring forward a few of these into evidence.

49 [41] In I Samuel 9:15-16, it is narrated that God revealed to Samuel that he would send Saul to him. And yet God did not send him to Samuel as human beings usually send someone to another; but this sending of God's was nothing else but the very order of nature. Saul, no doubt, was searching for his asses that he had lost (as is narrated in the aforementioned chapter);[41] and, resolving now to go back home without them, on the basis of his servant's counsel he went to the Prophet Samuel, that he might know from him where he could discover them; and it is not established on the basis of the narrative as a whole that, besides this very order of nature, Saul had any other command of God to go to Samuel.

50 [42] In Psalm 105:24, it is said that God changed the Egyptians' spirit so that they hated the Israelites: this change was plainly natural as well, as is obvious on the basis of Exodus 1,[42] where the underlying[43] reason of the Egyptians is narrated which moved them to reduce the Israelites to slavery.

51 [43] In Genesis 9:13, God says to Noah that he will give a rainbow in a cloud: surely this action of God's is also none other than the refraction and reflection of the sun's rays which the same rays undergo in drops of water.

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36 See 3.1 1-5.
37 See 6.1.9.
38 See 4.3.19-31.
39 Lit.: through the consequence.
40 Or· stories.
41 I Sam. 9:3ff.
42 Ex. 1:9-11.
43 More or less lit.: not superficial.

52 In Psalm 147:18, the natural action and heat of the wind by which frost and snow are melted, are called God's word. And in verse 15, wind and cold are called God's saying and word.

53 Wind and fire in Psalm 104:4 are called God's messengers and ministers; and many other things in this mode are found in Scripture which indicate very clearly that God's decree, bidding, saying, and word are nothing else but the very action and order of nature.

54 [44] {90} Therefore, there is no doubt that everything that is narrated in Scripture happens naturally and yet is being referred to God, since, as we have already shown,[44] it is not part° of Scripture to teach matters through natural causes, but only to narrate those matters that broadly occupy the imagination, and this in a Method and style which better serve for admiring the matters more and, consequently, for impressing devotion in the psyches of the vulgar.

55 [45] If, therefore, some things are found in Sacred Writ whose causes we do not know how to render, and which seem to have happened alongside—indeed against—the order of nature, they do not have to give us pause; but it is altogether to be believed that what has happened in reality has happened naturally. This is also confirmed from the fact that many details were found in the miracles even though they are not always narrated, especially when they are sung in a Poetic style. The details of the miracles, I say, clearly show that they require natural causes.

56 [46] Namely, for the Egyptians to be infested with scabs, Moses' task was to scatter dust up into the air (see Ex. 9:10). Locusts invaded the region of the Egyptians from the natural command of God as well—namely, from the east wind blowing an entire day and night—and left it by a very strong west wind (see Ex. 10:14, 19).

57 By God's same bidding as well, the sea opened a route for the Jews (see Ex. 14:21), namely, by Eurus,[45] which blew very strongly the full night.

58 [47] Furthermore, for Elisha to rouse a boy who was believed dead, he had to lie on the boy several times until he first warmed up and at last opened his eyes (see II Ki. 4:34-35).

59 So, too, in the Gospel of John, chapter 9,[46] some details are narrated which Christ used to heal the blind; and thus many other things are found in Scripture which all show sufficiently that miracles require something else besides God's absolute command, as they say.

60 [48] Therefore it is to be believed that, although the details of the miracles and their natural causes are not always or all narrated, still the miracles did not happen without them.

61 This is also established by Exodus 14:27, where it is narrated only that the sea swelled once more solely on the basis of Moses' nod, and no mention is made of the wind.

62 And yet in the Song (15:10), it is said that it happened from the fact that God blew with his wind (that is, with a very strong wind). Therefore, this detail is omitted in

[44] See 4 3.19-31, with 6.1 48.

[45] I.e., the east wind. Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* I 110-12.

[46] John 9:6-7, 11, 15.

the history,[47] and because of that, the miracle {91} seems greater.

63 [49] Yet perhaps someone will insist that we find a great many things in Scripture which do not seem able to be explained in any mode through natural causes, such as that the sins of human beings and that their imprecations can be the cause of rain and of the earth's fertility,[48] or that faith can heal the blind,[49] and other things in this mode which are narrated in the Bible.

64 But to these things, I deem I have already replied. For I have shown[50] that Scripture does not teach matters through proximate causes, but only narrates matters in the order and phrases by which it can move human beings—and mainly the plebs—to devotion in the greatest degree; and because of this, it speaks of God and of the matters quite improperly, no doubt since it is not eager to convince reason, but to affect and occupy human beings' fancy and imagination.

65 [50] For if Scripture were to narrate the sacking of some empire as political historians usually do, it would not stir the plebs in any way°; but, on the other hand, it would do so in the greatest degree if it depicted everything poetically and referred it to God, as it usually does.

66 Accordingly, when Scripture narrates that the earth is sterile on account of the sins of human beings[51] or that the blind are healed on the basis of faith,[52] the things being narrated do not have to move us, any more than when it narrates that on account of the sins of human beings God is angered or saddened or repentant of a good promised and done, or that God recalls a promise from seeing a sign, and very many other things that are said either poetically or in accordance with the opinions of the Writer and related prejudices.

67 [51] Therefore, we absolutely conclude here that everything that is narrated in Scripture as having happened in reality has necessarily happened in accordance with the laws of nature, as everything does; and if something is found which can be demonstrated apodictically to conflict with the laws of nature or to have been unable to follow on the basis of them, it is plainly to be believed that it was inserted in Sacred Writ by sacrilegious human beings. For, whatever is contrary to nature is contrary to reason; and what is contrary to reason is absurd, and therefore refutable as well.

68 [52] It is now left only to note, or rather to recollect, a few more things concerning the interpretation of miracles (for the chief things have already been said) and to illustrate by one or another example what I have promised to do here in the Fourth place;[53] and I want to do so lest someone, in interpreting some miracle badly, be rashly suspected of having found something in Scripture which conflicts with the light of nature.

69 [53] For quite rarely does it come about that human beings narrate some matter

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[47] Or: story.

[48] E.g., Lev. 26:3-43, Dt. 28:1-24 passim.

[49] Mt. 9:27-30.

[50] See 1.5.5-6.

[51] E.g., Lev. 26:20, Dt. 28:15-18, Hag. 1:5-12.

[52] Mk. 10:52, Lk. 18:42.

[53] See 6.1.10.

simply as it happened,[54] so as to mix nothing of their own Judgment in the narrative.

70 Indeed, when they see or hear something new, {92} unless they are very cautious about their own preconceived opinions, they are often so predisposed to them that, plainly, they perceive something other than what they saw or heard happening, especially if the thing being dealt with surpasses the grasp of the one narrating or hearing it, and above all if it relates to his interest for it to happen in a certain mode.

71 [54] Hence it comes about that human beings in their Chronicles and histories[55] narrate their own opinions more than the very matters being dealt with; and one and the same incident is narrated so differently by two human beings who have different opinions, that they seem only to be speaking of two incidents; and, finally, it is often not very difficult to investigate the opinions of Chroniclers and historians from the histories alone.

72 I could bring up many examples to confirm this, both of Philosophers who have written a history of nature, and of Chroniclers, if I did not figure it was superfluous. From Sacred Scripture, however, I will only bring up one: let the Reader himself judge the rest.

73 [55] At the time of Joshua, the Hebrews (as we have already admonished above)[56] believed with the vulgar that the sun moves with a diurnal motion, as they call it, and that the earth is at rest; and to this preconceived opinion, they adapted the miracle that happened to them when they fought against those five kings.[57] For they did not simply narrate that that day was longer than usual, but that the sun and moon stood still, or ceased from their motion[58]—which at that time could serve them in no small way° for convincing the Heathens, who prayed to the sun, and for proving by experience itself that the sun is under the imperium of another deity, on the basis of whose nod it is bound to change its natural order.

74 [56] Therefore, partly on the basis of religion, partly on the basis of preconceived opinions, they conceived and narrated the matter quite otherwise than it could have happened in reality.

75 To interpret the miracles of Scripture and to understand on the basis of their narratives how they really happened, therefore, it is necessary to know the opinions of those who first narrated them and left them to us in writing, and to distinguish the opinions from what the senses were able to represent to the narrators. For otherwise we will confuse their opinions and judgments with the miracle itself as it really happened. And it is relevant to know their opinions not only for these things, but also so that we do not confuse the matters that really happened with matters that were imaginary and nothing but Prophetic representations.

76 [57] For many things in Scripture are narrated as realities, and are even believed to be realities, {93} which nevertheless were only representations and imaginary matters: for example, that God (the highest being) descended out of heaven, and that Mount

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[54] Here Spinoza's Latin verb is *gerere*, rather than *contigere*, as elsewhere, e.g. in 6.1.70.

[55] Or: stories. Likewise later in 6.1.71f.

[56] See 2.8.3-5.

[57] Josh. 10:3ff.

[58] Josh. 10:12-13.

Sinai was smoking since God had descended above it surrounded by fire (see Ex. 19:18 and Dt. 5:19), and that Elijah ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot and with fiery horses.[59] Surely all of these were only representations adapted to the opinions of those who handed them down to us as they were represented to them, namely, as actual matters.

77 [58] For everyone who is a bit wiser than the vulgar knows that God does not have a right or left hand, and is not moved or at rest or in a place, but is absolutely infinite, and all perfections are contained in him.

78 These things, I say, they know who judge matters purely on the basis of perceptions of the understanding,[60] and not simply as the imagination is affected by the external senses, as the vulgar usually do; for they therefore imagine God as bodily and as holding a royal imperium: they fantasize his throne as being in the vault of heaven above the stars, whose distance from the earth they believe to be not very far.

79 And to these and similar opinions, a great many incidents in Scripture have been adapted, which therefore do not have to be accepted as real by Philosophers.

80 [59] Finally, for understanding miracles as they really[61] happened, it is relevant to know the phrases and tropes of the Hebrews. For he who does not pay sufficient attention to them will attach many miracles to Scripture which its writers were never thinking to narrate; and so, plainly, he will be ignorant not only of events and miracles as they really happened, but also of the mind of the authors of the sacred codices.

81 [60] For example, Zechariah, speaking of some future war, says in 14:7: **והיה יום אחד הוא יודע ליהוה לא יום ולא לילה והיה לעת ערב יהיה אור** *And the day will be unique, recognized only by God;* (for there will be) *no day and no night, and there will be light at evening time.*

82 By these words, he seems to predict a great miracle; and yet he means to signify nothing else but that the war will be pending the whole day and its outcome recognized only by God, and that they will achieve victory at evening time. For the Prophets were used to predicting and writing about the victories and defeats of nations in similar phrases.

83 [61] Thus we see Isaiah, who in chapter 13 depicts the sacking of Babylon as follows: **כי כוכבי השמים וכסיליהם לא יהלו אורם חשך השמש בצאתו וירח לא יגיה אורו** *Since the stars of heaven* **{94}***and its constellations will not illuminate with their light, the sun will darken in its rising, and the moon will not send out the splendor of its light*[62]—which I surely figure no one believes happened in the sacking of that empire; nor what he soon adds as well, namely **על כן שמים ארגיז ותרעש הארץ ממקומו** *On that account, I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will move*

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[59] II Ki 2:11

[60] Lit.: on the basis of the perceptions of the pure understanding.

[61] Here the Latin is *realiter* (akin to *reales*, rendered as "real" in 6 1.79, immediately above), rather than *revera*, which is the Latin word we have rendered as "really" in all other instances, including later in 6.1.80. Similarly, "realities" at 6.1.76 is *realia*.

[62] Is. 13:10.

*from out of its place.*[63]

84 [62] So too, to signify to the Jews that they would return securely from Babylonia to Jerusalem and not suffer thirst en route, the second-last verse of Isaiah 48 says: ולא צמאו בחרבות הוליכם מים מצור הזיל למו ויבקע צור ויזבו מים *And they did not thirst: he led them through the desert; he poured water for them out of the rock; he broke the rock and waters flowed.*[64]

85 In these words, I say, he means to signify nothing else but that the Jews, as it happened, discovered fountains in the desert by which they eased their thirst. For when they entered Jerusalem with Cyrus' consent, it is not established that similar miracles happened to them. [63] And in this mode a great many things occur in Sacred Writ which were only a mode of speaking among the Jews, and there is no need to recount them all here specifically. But I only want it noted in general that, in these phrases, the Hebrews were accustomed to speaking not only with embellishment, but also—and indeed mostly—devoutly.

86 For because of this, *bless God* is discovered in Sacred Writ for *curse God* (see I Ki. 21:10 and Job 2:9); and because of this as well, they refer everything to God; and therefore Scripture seems to be narrating nothing but miracles, and this when it speaks of things natural in the greatest degree, a few examples of which we have already related above.[65] Therefore, it is to be believed that when Scripture says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart,[66] nothing else is signified but that he made Pharaoh stubborn.

87 And when it is said that God opens the windows of heaven,[67] it signifies nothing else but that it rained much water—and so for other things.

88 [64] If someone will pay attention to these things carefully, therefore, and to the fact that many things will be narrated quite briefly, without any details and almost truncatedly, he will find almost nothing in Scripture which could be demonstrated to conflict with the natural light; and, on the other hand, he will be able, with a little meditation, to understand and easily interpret many things that have seemed very obscure.

89 Now with these things, I figure I have shown sufficiently clearly what I have been aiming at.

90 [65] Still, before I make an end to this Chapter, yet another thing remains which I want to admonish here. Namely, I have proceeded by another method completely in connection with miracles here than in connection with Prophecy.

91 {95} For concerning Prophecy, I did not affirm anything except what I could conclude on the basis of foundations revealed in Sacred Writ; but here I have elicited the chief things solely on the basis of principles recognized by the natural light. For since Prophecy surpasses the grasp of human beings and the question is merely Theological, I could not affirm anything about it, or know what it chiefly consists of, except on the basis of revealed foundations. And so I was then compelled to devise a

[63] Is. 13:13
[64] Is. 48:21.
[65] See 6.1.47-67.
[66] E g., Ex. 4.21, 7·13, 22, etc.
[67] Gen. 7:11, Mal 3:10.

history of Prophecy and to form some dogmas on the basis of it which would teach me the nature of Prophecy and its properties as far as can be done.

92 [66] Yet here in connection with miracles, since what we are inquiring into (namely, whether we can grant that something happens in nature which would conflict with its laws or which could not follow on the basis of them) is plainly philosophical, I will not need to do anything similar. Indeed, I have proceeded advisedly to unravel this question on the basis of foundations known by the natural light, inasmuch as they are the most recognized. I say that I have proceeded advisedly. For I could have easily solved it as well solely from the dogmas and foundations of Scripture. So that this might be obvious to each, I will show it here in a few words°.

93 [67] Scripture in a few passages affirms of nature in general that it keeps a fixed and unchangeable order, as in Psalm 148:6 and Jeremiah 31:35-36.

94 Besides, the Philosopher[68] in his Ecclesiastes 1:10 very clearly teaches that nothing new happens in nature. And in verses 11-12 he says, illustrating the same thing, that although something may sometimes happen which seems new, still it is not new, but has happened in ages that have been before and of which there is no memory. For, as he says, there is no memory of the ancients among those nowadays, nor will there be any of those nowadays among posterity.

95 [68] Furthermore, he says in 3:11 that God has thoroughly ordered all things in their time; and in 3:14 he says that he has noted that whatever God does will remain for eternity, and nothing can be added to it or subtracted from it. All of this teaches very clearly that nature keeps a fixed and unchangeable order, that God has been the same for all ages recognized and unrecognized by us, and that the laws of nature are therefore perfect and fertile, so that nothing can be added to or subtracted from them; and, finally, that miracles do not seem to be anything new except on account of the ignorance of human beings.

96 [69] These things are therefore expressly taught in Scripture; yet nowhere is it taught that anything happens in nature which would conflict with its laws or {96} which is unable to follow from them—and so it is not to be attached to Scripture either.

97 It goes along with these things that miracles require causes and details (as we have already shown),[69] and that they follow, not from I know not what royal imperium the vulgar attach to God, but from the divine imperium and decree—that is (as we have shown from Scripture itself as well),[70] from the laws of nature and its order; and that, finally, miracles could be made by seducers as well, as is convincing from Deuteronomy 13 and Matthew 24:24.[71]

98 [70] From these things, besides, it follows very plainly that miracles were natural events; and so they are to be explained so as to be seen as neither new (if I may use Solomon's word) nor in conflict with nature, but, if it can be done, as going along with natural events in the greatest degree: I have handed down some rules derived from

[68] I.e., Solomon. Cf 4.4.34-45.

[69] See 6.1.12-19 with 6.1 7.

[70] See 6.1.45-67 with 6.1.9.

[71] Cf. 6 1.36-38

Scripture alone[72] so that this could be done more easily by each.

99 [71] Still, although I am saying that Scripture teaches these things, I still do not understand that they are taught by it as lessons necessary for salvation, but only that the Prophets embraced these same things as we have. Therefore, each is free to figure out these things as he feels is best for himself for taking up the worship of God and religion with a full spirit.

100 [72] Josephus feels this way° as well. For so he writes at the conclusion of *Antiquities* II.[73]

101 *Let no one, in truth, disbelieve in the word of the miracle, if the way of salvation made through the sea, whether by the will of God or spontaneously revealed, became clear to ancient*[74] *human beings lacking in malice, when, for those who were once with King Alexander of Macedonia as well—who were from the more recent*[75] *of ancient times°—the Pamphylian* Sea *was divided; and when* there was no *other* road, *it offered them a crossing, since God wanted to destroy the principate of the Persians through him. And all who have written of Alexander's deeds confess this; and therefore let each figure these things out as he pleases.*

102 These are Josephus' words and his judgment on the faith in miracles.

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[72] I e., in 6.1.68-98; cf. 6.1.10.

[73] Josephus, *Antiquities* II.347-48. Cf. Arrian, *History of Alexander* I.26 , Strabo, *Geography* XIV.666f.

[74] Or: earlier.

[75] Reading *recentioribus* for *resistentibus*.

# *CHAPTER 7*

# The Interpretation of Scripture

¶1 {**97**} It is indeed in everyone's mouth that Sacred Scripture is the word of God, which teaches human beings true blessedness or the way of salvation. But in respect of the matter itself, they plainly indicate otherwise.

2 For the vulgar do not seem to care for anything less than living by the lessons of Sacred Scripture; and we see almost everyone passing off his own comments as God's word and eager for nothing else but compelling others, under the pretext of religion, to think as he does.

3 [2] We see, I say, Theologians often worried over how they could twist their own fantasies and wishes out of Sacred Writ and fortify them with divine authority, and not doing anything with less misgiving and more rashness than interpreting the Scriptures, or the mind of the Holy Spirit; and if anything then has them worried, it is not that they are afraid of attributing some error to the Holy Spirit and wandering from the way of salvation, but of being convicted of error by others so that their own authority is trampled under foot and they are despised by others.

4 [3] For if human beings were to say, out of a true spirit, what they attest to about Scripture in words, then they would have another pattern of living completely, and so many discords would not agitate their minds; and they would not strive with so many hatreds, and would not be bound to interpreting Scripture with such blind and rash longing, and devising new things in Religion. But on the contrary, they would not dare to embrace anything as Scripture's teaching which they were not taught by it very clearly. And, finally, those blasphemers who have not been afraid of adulterating Scripture in very many passages would have shrunk most from such impropriety and would have held back their blasphemous hands from them.

5 [4] Yet ambition and impropriety have been so potent that as a result religion consists not so much in complying with the lessons of the Holy Spirit, as in defending the comments of human beings—indeed, religion is not confined to charity, but to disseminating discords among human beings and propagating a most antagonistic hatred, which they cover with the false name of divine zeal and ardent enthusiasm.

6 Along with these evils has gone superstition, which teaches human beings to despise reason and nature, and to admire and venerate only what conflicts with both of these. [5] {**98**} It is therefore no wonder that, for human beings to admire and venerate Scripture more, they are eager to explain it so that it seems to conflict with these—reason and nature—to the greatest possible extent. And therefore they dream that the deepest mysteries are hidden in Sacred Writ; and they are worn out with

these—that is, with investigating absurdities—while other, useful things are neglected; and whatever they fantasize while being so obsessed, they attribute it all to the Holy Spirit and endeavor to defend it with the utmost force and impulse of their emotions.

7 For human beings are so equipped that, whatever they conceive purely with the understanding,[1] they defend with the understanding and reason alone; on the other hand, whatever they opine on the basis of the emotions of their psyche, they defend with these as well.

8 [6] That we might be extricated from these turmoils, free the mind from theological prejudices, and not rashly embrace human fantasies as divine lessons, however, the true method of interpreting Scripture is to be dealt with and discussed. For if this is ignored, we can know nothing for certain of what Scripture or what the Holy Spirit means to teach.

9 As I would enfold it here in a few words°, moreover, I say that the method of interpreting Scripture scarcely differs from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely.

10 [7] For just as the method of interpreting nature consists mainly in laying out a history of nature on the basis of which, as on the basis of certain data, we conclude the definitions of natural things, so too it is necessary for interpreting Scripture to furnish its straightforward history and conclude on the basis of it by legitimate inferences,[2] as on the basis of certain data and principles, the mind of the authors of Scripture. [8] For thus anyone will always proceed without any danger of erring (if, no doubt, he will admit that no other principles and data for interpreting Scripture and the matters that are contained in it are to be discussed, except only those that are brought out by Scripture itself and its history), and he will be able to discuss what surpasses our grasp equally as securely as what we know by the natural light.

11 [9] But for it to be clearly established that this way is not only certain but also unique and that it agrees with the method of interpreting nature, it is to be noted that Scripture very often deals with things that are unable to be deduced on the basis of principles recognized by the natural light. For histories[3] and revelations compose its largest part; [10] yet the histories mainly contain miracles, that {99} is (as we have shown in the previous Chapter),[4] narratives of unusual things of nature, accommodated to the opinions and judgments of the historians who wrote them. The revelations, moreover, have also been accommodated to the opinions of the Prophets, as we have shown in Chapter 2;[5] and these really do surpass human grasp.

12 Therefore, knowledge of all these—that is, of almost all matters that are contained in Scripture—has to be sought from Scripture itself alone, just as knowledge of nature does from nature itself.

13 [11] As for what touches on the moral lessons that are contained in the Bible as well, although they can be demonstrated on the basis of common notions, still it

[1] Lit.: with the pure understanding.
[2] Lit.: consequences.
[3] Or: stories. Likewise later in 7.1.11
[4] See 6.1.68-102.
[5] See 2.5.1ff., esp 2.7.12-10 1.

cannot be demonstrated on the basis of the latter that Scripture teaches them; but this can be established solely on the basis of Scripture itself.

14 Indeed, if we want to attest to Scripture's divinity without prejudice, the fact that it teaches true moral lessons has to be established for us solely on the same basis. For solely on this basis can its divinity be demonstrated. For we have shown that the certainty of the Prophets is established chiefly on the basis of the fact that the Prophets had a spirit inclined to the equitable and the good.[6]

15 Therefore, for us to be able to have faith in them, this same thing has to be established for us also.

16 [12] That we cannot be convinced of God's divinity on the basis of miracles, moreover, we have already demonstrated as well,[7] to say nothing of the fact that miracles could also be made by Pseudo-prophets.[8]

17 Therefore, Scripture's divinity has to be established on the basis of this alone: that it teaches true virtue.

18 Yet this can be established on the basis of Scripture alone.

19 If this could not be done, we would not be embracing it and attesting to its divinity without great prejudice.

20 Accordingly, the whole knowledge of Scripture has to be sought from it alone.

21 [13] Finally, Scripture does not hand down definitions of the things it speaks about—as nature does not either.

22 Therefore, just as the definitions of natural things are to be concluded on the basis of the different actions of nature, in the same mode the definitions of the things Scripture speaks about are to be elicited on the basis of the different narratives that occur about each thing in Sacred° Writ.

23 [14] The universal rule for interpreting Scripture is therefore not to attribute anything to Scripture as its lesson which we do not have transparent in the greatest possible degree on the basis of its own history.

24 How its history has to be and what it mainly has to° narrate, moreover, is now to be said here.

¶2 [15] Namely, first, it has to contain the nature and properties of the language in which the books of Scripture were written and which their Authors were used to speaking.

2 **{100}** For thus we will be able to investigate all the senses that any one speech can admit on the basis of the common usage of speaking.

3 And since all the writers of the Old as well as the New Testament were Hebrews, it is certain that a History of the Hebrew language is necessary above all for understanding the books not only of the Old Testament, which have been written in this language, but also of the New. For although they have been spread[9] into other languages, they are still Hebraic.

¶3 [16] Second, it has to gather the tenets of each book and reduce them to overall

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[6] See 2.3.8-4.5.

[7] See 6.1.20-44

[8] See 6.1 36-38; cf 6.1.97.

[9] See Glossary, s.v "vulgar."

headings, so that we can have at hand all those that are found to be about the same matter. Furthermore, it has° to note all those that are ambiguous or obscure, or seem to conflict with one another.

2 Yet I call tenets obscure or clear here whose sense is elicited, easily or with difficulty, on the basis of the context of the speech—and not insofar as their truth is perceived easily or with difficulty by reason.

3 For we are laboring solely from the sense of the speeches, and not from their truth.

4 [17] Indeed, while we are inquiring into the sense of Scripture, caution is to be taken first and foremost against being predisposed by our own reasoning (to say nothing for now about prejudices) insofar as it is based on the principles of natural knowledge. But so that we not confuse the true sense with the truth of things, it is to be investigated solely on the basis of the usage of the language alone, or on the basis of reasoning that does not acknowledge any other foundation than Scripture.

5 That all this may be more clearly understood, I will illustrate it by an example. [18] These tenets of Moses, *God is fire* and *God is jealous*, are as clear as possible, so long as we pay attention solely to the signification of the words; and therefore I also put them among the clear ones, even if in respect of truth and reason they are very obscure. Indeed, even though their literal sense conflicted with the natural light, that sense is still to be retained—namely the literal—unless it is clearly opposed as well to the principles and foundations being sought on the basis of the history of Scripture. And on the other hand, if these tenets were found to conflict in their literal interpretation with the principles being sought on the basis of Scripture, although they agreed very much with reason they are still to be interpreted otherwise (metaphorically).

6 [19] Accordingly, that we might know whether or not Moses believed that God is fire, is not in any mode to be concluded on the basis of whether° this opinion agrees with reason or conflicts with it, but only on the basis of **{101}** other tenets of Moses himself.

7 Viz., since Moses also clearly teaches in many passages that God has no likeness to visible things that are in the heavens, on the earth or in the water, hence it is to be concluded that this tenet—or all the former ones—is to be explained metaphorically.

8 [20] Yet since the literal sense is to be departed from as little as possible, therefore it is to be inquired first whether this odd[10] tenet, *God is fire*, admits of another sense besides the literal: that is, whether the noun *fire* signifies anything else besides a natural fire.

9 For if this tenet is not found to signify anything else on the basis of the usage of the language, it is not to be interpreted in any other mode either, however it may conflict with reason. But on the contrary, all the other tenets, however compatible they may be with reason, are still to be accommodated to it.

10 [21] For if this accommodation cannot be made on the basis of the usage of language either, then these tenets are irreconcilable and a judgment about them is therefore to be suspended.

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[10] Lit · unique

11 But since the noun *fire* is taken for anger and jealousy as well (see Job 31:12), hence Moses' tenets are easily reconciled, and we legitimately conclude that these two tenets, *God is fire* and *God is jealous*, are one and the same tenet.

12 [22] Besides, since Moses clearly teaches that God is jealous[11] and nowhere teaches that God lacks passions or pathemata of the spirit, hence it is plainly to be concluded that Moses believed—or at least wanted to teach—this same thing, however much we might believe that this tenet conflicts with reason.

13 For, as we have already shown,[12] we are not permitted to twist the mind of Scripture to the dictates of our own reason and to our preconceived opinions; but the whole knowledge of the Bible is to be sought solely on its basis.

¶4 [23] Third, finally, this history has to narrate the case histories° of all the books of the Prophets whose memory is among us. Viz., the life, mores and studies of the author of each book, who he was, on what occasion, at what time, for whom and, finally, in what language he wrote.

2 Furthermore, there is the fortune of each book: namely, how it was first received and whose hands it fell into; furthermore, how many variant readings it had, and by which[13] council it was accepted among the sacred ones; and, finally, how all the books that everyone now confesses to be sacred coalesced into one corpus.[14]

3 A history of Scripture, I say, has to contain all these things.

4 [24] For, so that we might know which tenets were put forward as {102} laws and which, in truth, as moral lessons, it is relevant to know the life, mores, and studies of the author. Add the fact that we can explain the words of someone more easily, the better we recognize his genius and mental cast.

5 Furthermore, lest we confuse the eternal lessons with those that could have been of use only at the time or only a few times°, it is also relevant to know on what occasion, at what time, and for what nation or age each lesson was written.

6 [25] It is relevant, finally, to know the rest of what we have said besides, so that we may also know, besides the authorship of each book, whether it could have been tampered with by adulterous hands or not, whether errors crept in, whether they were corrected by men sufficiently experienced and worthy of faith.

7 All these things are very necessary as information, so that we do not embrace by some blind impulse whatever is put in front of us, but only what is certain and indubitable.

¶5 [26] Now after we have this history of Scripture and firmly decree not to state anything for certain as the teaching of the Prophets which does not follow on the basis of this history, or is not elicited on the basis of it as clearly as possible, then it will be time for us to gird up for investigating the mind of the Prophets and of the Holy Spirit.

2 But for this, method and order is required as well, like the one we use for the interpretation of nature from its history.

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[11] E.g., Ex. 20:5, 34:14, Dt. 4:24.

[12] Cf. 7.1.8-23.

[13] Lit.: whose. Cf. 10.2.60.

[14] Or: body.

3 [27] For, just as in scrutinizing natural things we endeavor to investigate, first of all, the most universal things common to the whole of nature—viz., motion and rest, and their laws and rules which nature always observes and by which it continually acts—and we proceed step by step on the basis of these to other, less universal things, so too what is to be sought first on the basis of the history of Scripture is what is most universal and what is the base and foundation of the whole of Scripture and, finally, what is commended in it by all the Prophets as an eternal teaching and very useful for all mortals.

4 For example, that a unique and all-powerful God exists who cares for everyone and cherishes above all those who adore him and love their neighbor as themselves, etc.

5 These and the like, I say, Scripture everywhere teaches so clearly and so expressly that there would never be anyone who would waver about its sense in connection with them.

6 [28] What God is, and by what plan he sees all things and provides for them, however, **{103}** these and the like Scripture does not teach explicitly and as an eternal teaching. But on the contrary, we have already shown above[15] that the Prophets themselves did not agree about them. And so, about such things nothing is to be established as the teaching of the Holy Spirit, even though it could be determined very well by the natural light.

7 [29] Once this universal teaching of Scripture is thoroughly known, therefore, other, less universal things are to be proceeded to which still have to do with the common conduct of life and which are derived from this universal teaching as rivulets—as are all particular outward actions of true virtue which cannot be performed except on a given occasion. And whatever is found about these things in Sacred° Writ which is obscure or ambiguous is to be explained and determined by Scripture's universal teaching. If they are found to be contrary to each other, moreover, it is to be seen on what occasion, at what time, or for whom they were written.

8 [30] For example, when Christ says, *Blessèd are the mourners, since they will receive consolation,*[16] we do not know on the basis of this Text how he would understand *mourners*. But since afterward he teaches that we not be worried about anything except God's kingdom alone and its justice, which is commended as the highest good (see Mt. 6:33), hence it follows that by *mourners* he understands only those who mourn for the kingdom of God and the justice neglected by human beings. For only those can mourn for it who do not love anything except the divine kingdom, or equity, and plainly despise the rest of fortune.

9 [31] So too, when he says *But those who strike you upon your right cheek, turn the left one to them as well,*[17] and what follows further.

10 If Christ had bidden these things as a Lawgiver to judges, he would by this precept have destroyed the law of Moses. Yet he openly admonishes to the contrary (see Mt. 5:17). Therefore, it is to be seen who has said these things, to whom, and at

[15] See 6.1.47-67

[16] Mt. 5:4.

[17] Mt. 6:39.

what time.

11 [32] Namely, Christ said them, not as a lawgiver instituting laws, but as a teacher teaching lessons, since (as we have shown above)[18] he did not want to correct outward actions so much as the spirit.

12 Furthermore, he said these things to oppressed human beings who lived in a corrupt republic, where justice was quite neglected and whose ruin he saw nearly impending.

13 Yet we see that this very same thing that Christ teaches here while the City's[19] ruin is impending, Jeremiah taught as well at the City's first sacking, no doubt at a similar time (see Lam. 3, letters Tet and Yod).[20] [33] Therefore, since the Prophets did not teach this except in a time of oppression {104} and it was not brought forth anywhere as a law and, on the other hand, although Moses (who did not write at a time of oppression but—and note this—labored to institute a good republic) condemned vengeance and hatred toward a neighbor as well, he still bade paying an eye for an eye,[21] hence it very clearly follows solely on the basis of these same foundations of Scripture that this lesson of Christ's and Jeremiah's—about tolerating wrongs and granting all things to the impious—only takes place in places where justice is neglected and in times of oppression, and not in a good republic. Indeed, in a good republic, where justice is defended, each is bound, if he wants to be held just, to requite injuries before a judge (see Lev. 5:1), not on account of vengeance (see Lev. 19:17-18), but in the spirit of defending justice and the laws of the Fatherland, and for it not to be expedient for evil men to be evil.

14 [34] All this plainly agrees with natural reason as well.

15 Many other examples in this mode can be brought up; but I judge that these are sufficient for explaining my mind and the utility of this method, the only thing I care about at present.

16 Yet so far we have been teaching only how to investigate those of Scripture's tenets that have to do with the conduct of life, and which on that account are able to be investigated more easily. For there has never really been any controversy about them among the Writers of the Bible.

17 [35] The rest that occur in Sacred° Writ, however, and which are part° of theory alone, cannot be tracked down so easily. For the way toward these is narrower. For, since in theoretical matters (as we have already shown)[22] the Prophets disagree among themselves, and the narratives of the matters are mostly accommodated to the prejudices of each epoch, we are hardly permitted to infer[23] the mind of one Prophet on the basis of the clearer passages of another, nor explain that they have been fostering one and the same tenet, unless it is very evidently established.

18 [36] How the mind of the Prophets in such passages is to be uncovered on the

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[18] See 7.5.8-10, with 4 4 27-28

[19] I.e., Jerusalem's.

[20] Lam. 3:25-27, 28-30.

[21] Ex 21:22-24, Lev 24:19-20, and Dt. 19:21, with Lev. 19:17-18.

[22] See esp. 2.7.12-10 1

[23] Lit.: conclude.

basis of the history of Scripture, I will now expound in a few words°.

19 Namely, in connection with these things too, one is to begin from the most universal things—by inquiring first of all into what is clearest on the basis of the tenets of Scripture: what prophecy or revelation is, and what it mainly consists of in reality.

20 Then, what a miracle is, and thus the matters most common besides. From here, one is to descend to the opinions of each Prophet. And on the basis of these, one is to proceed ultimately to the sense of each revelation or Prophecy, history,[24] and miracle. **{105}**

21 [37] What caution is to be used, moreover, lest we confuse the mind of the Prophets and Historians in these things with the mind of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the matter, we have shown above with many examples from their passages.[25] Therefore, I do not necessarily have to deal with these at more length. Still, this is to be noted in connection with the sense of the revelations: this method only teaches what the Prophets really saw or heard, not what they wanted to signify or represent by those hieroglyphics. For we can guess at this, yet not deduce it for certain on the basis of Scripture's foundations.

22 [38] We have accordingly shown the plan of interpreting Scripture, and at the same time we have demonstrated that this is the unique and more certain way to investigate its true sense.

23 I do confess that those are more certain about its true sense, if there are such, who have a reliable[26] tradition or true explanation of it received from the Prophets themselves, as the Pharisees claim; or if they have a Pontiff who cannot err about the interpretation of Scripture, which Roman Catholics boast.

24 [39] Still, inasmuch as we cannot be certain either of this tradition or of the authority of the Pontiff, we cannot base anything certain on these either. For the most ancient of the Christians have denied the latter and the most ancient Sects of the Jews[27] have denied the former. And if, furthermore, we paid attention to the series of years (to say nothing of other things) which the Pharisees received from their Rabbis, by which they carry this tradition all the way° to Moses, we will find it to be false, as I show in another place.[28]

25 [40] Therefore, such a tradition has to be very suspect for us. And although we are compelled in our Method to suppose some tradition of the Jews as incorrupt, namely, the signification of the words of the Hebrew language which we have received from them, we still have doubts about the former, and hardly any about the latter.

26 For it could never have been of use to anyone to change the signification of some word; yet it was, not infrequently, to change the sense of some speech.

27 [41] Indeed, that is also very difficult to do. For those who endeavor to change the signification of some words are at the same time compelled to explain all the

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[24] Or: story

[25] Cf 1 16.2-22.7, 2.2 10.9, with 7.3.2-13.

[26] Lit.. certain.

[27] I e., the Sadducees. Cf 18.1.10-15 with 10.2 25, 56, 12.1 5, 18.4.3.

[28] See 9.1.29-57

authors who have written in that language and have used that word in its accepted signification, by the mental cast or mind of each author, or else° to distort with the utmost caution.

28 [42] Furthermore, the vulgar keep the same° language as the learnèd, whereas only the latter keep° the senses of the speeches, and the books. And therefore we can easily conceive that the learnèd could have changed or corrupted the sense of the speech of some {106} very rare book that they have had in their own control, but not the signification of the words. Add that, if someone wanted to change the signification of some word to which he is accustomed into another, between both speaking and writing he will not be able to observe it later on without difficulty.

29 [43] Accordingly, for these and other reasons, we persuade ourselves that it could not have come into anyone's mind to corrupt any language, yet it often could have to corrupt the mind of some writer by changing his speeches or interpreting them erroneously.

30 Since this whole method of ours (which is based on the stipulation° that knowledge of Scripture be sought solely from Scripture°) is the unique and true one, whatever it will not be able to achieve in acquiring a full knowledge of Scripture, is plainly to be despaired of.

31 [44] What difficulty it might have, however, or what is to be desired of it so that it could lead us to a full and certain knowledge of the Sacred Codices, is now to be said here.

32 A great difficulty with this method arises, in the first place, on the basis of the fact that it requires a full knowledge of the Hebrew language.

33 Yet where is this to be sought now? [45] The ancient cultivators of the Hebrew language left nothing of the foundations and teaching of this language to posterity. We, at least, do not have anything from them any more, not any Dictionary or Grammar or Rhetoric. And the Hebrew nation has lost all embellishments and all glory (no wonder, after it has suffered so many massacres and persecutions), and has only kept some few fragments of the language and of a few books. For almost all the names of fruits, birds, fish, and very many other matters have gone through the injuries of the times.

34 Furthermore, the signification of many nouns and verbs which occur in the Bible is either unknown or disputed.

35 [46] Since these things are all there are, we especially lack a phraseology of this language. For gluttonous time[29] has abolished from human memory almost all the phrases and modes of speaking peculiar to the Hebrew nation.

36 Accordingly, we will not always be able to investigate all the senses that each speech can admit on the basis of the usage of the language; and many speeches will occur, though expressed in very well recognized words, whose sense will still be very obscure and plainly impenetrable.[30]

37 [47] Along with this—the fact that we cannot have a complete history of the

[29] Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV.234.

[30] Lit.: perceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

Hebrew language—there is also the very constitution and nature of this language. From it there arise so many ambiguities {107} that it is impossible to discover such a method[31] as would teach how to investigate the true sense of all the speeches of Scripture.

38 For besides the causes of ambiguities common to all languages, some others are given in this language on the basis of which so many ambiguities are born. I adduce that it is worth noting them here.

¶6 [48] First, ambiguity and obscurity of speech often arise in the Bible on the basis of the fact that letters of the same organ may be taken for one another. The Hebrews divide all the letters of the alphabet into five classes, on account of the five instruments of the mouth which serve for pronunciation, namely, lips, tongue, teeth, palate, and throat.

2 For example, ה ע ח א *Alef, Chet, 'Ayin, Hey* are called gutturals, and without any discrimination—recognized by us, at least—are usurped for one another.

3 Namely, אל *el*, which signifies *to*, is often taken for על *'al*, which signifies *upon*, and vice versa.

4 Hence it happens that all parts of speech may often be rendered either ambiguous or as sounds that have no signification.

¶7 [49] Second, ambiguity of speech arises further on the basis of the multiple signification of conjunctions and adverbs.

2 For example, ו *Vav* serves indiscriminately to join and disjoin, and signifies *and, but, since, however, then.* כי *ki* has seven or eight significations, namely, *since, although, if, when, just as, that, combustion*, etc.

3 And so for almost all particles.

¶8 [50] There is a third thing, and it is the source of many ambiguities, since verbs in the Indicative lack a Present, Past, Imperfect, Pluperfect, Future perfect, and the other tenses most usual in other languages. All tenses besides the Present lack the Imperative and the Infinitive, and all lack the Subjunctive.

2 And although all these defective Tenses and Moods can be easily supplied—indeed with the utmost elegance—by certain rules deduced from the foundations of the language, still the most ancient writers plainly neglected them and indiscriminately usurped the Future tense for the Present and the Past and, on the other hand, the Past for the Future, and the Indicative for the Imperative and the Subjunctive besides; and they did so not without great amphiboly in their written° speech.[32]

3 [51] Besides these three causes of the ambiguities of the Hebrew language, two others in addition remain to be noted, either of which is of far greater importance.

4 The first of these is that the Hebrews do not have vowels.

5 The second {108} is that they did not usually mark, express or emphasize[33] their written° speech with any signs. [52] And although these two things—vowels and signs—are usually supplied by points and accents, still we cannot acquiesce in these, since they were invented and instituted by human beings of a later epoch, whose authority

[31] "Cf Annotation 7 " Spinoza's note.

[32] Lit.: speeches. Likewise in 7.8.5.

[33] Lit · distinguish, express or intend.

among us has to be worth nothing. The ancients wrote without points (that is, without vowels and signs), however (as is established by many attestations).

6 Posterity, in truth, added these two things as it seemed appropriate° to them in interpreting the Bible. Therefore, the accents and punctuations which we now have are mere interpretations of men° of today and deserve no more faith or authority than the rest of the authors' explanations.

7 [53] Those who are ignorant of this do not know for what reason the author who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews is to be excused for having, in 11:21, interpreted the text of Genesis 47:31 quite otherwise than is found° in the punctuated Hebrew text, as if the Apostle would have to learn the sense of Scripture from the Punctuators.

8 To me, the punctuators surely seem rather to be blamed: for anyone to see this and, at the same time, to see that this discrepancy has arisen solely from the lack of vowels, I will put both interpretations here.

9 [54] The punctuators—with their punctuations—have, as their interpretation,[34] *and Israel bowed himself upon*—or (changing ע *'Ayin* to א *Alef*, a letter of the same organ) *against —the head of the bed*. The Author of the Epistle has, however, *and Israel bowed himself upon the head of the staff*, no doubt reading מטה *mateh* in place of something else, מטה *mitah*: This difference arises from the vowels alone.

10 Now inasmuch as the age of Jacob alone is being dealt with in that narrative, and not his sickness, as in the following chapter,[35] in truth it seems more likely that the mind of the historian was that Jacob bowed himself onto the head of the staff (which old men of most advanced age need, no doubt, to support themselves), and not of the bed, especially since in this mode it would not be necessary to suppose any substitution of letters.

11 [55] Yet by this example, I have wanted not only to reconcile that passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews with the text of Genesis, but especially to show how little faith is to be put in the points and accents of the men of today. And so, one who wants to interpret Scripture without any prejudice is bound to doubt these things and examine them in full.

¶9 [56] On the basis of this constitution and nature of the Hebrew language, therefore (if we may return to our point), **{109}** anyone can easily conjecture that so many ambiguities have to arise that no method can be given by which they are all able to be determined.

2 For there is nothing by which we might hope that this can absolutely be done on the basis of a mutual correlation of speeches (which we have shown to be the only[36] way to extract the true sense from the many that any one speech can admit from the usage of language):[37] both since this correlation of speeches cannot illuminate any speech except by chance, since no Prophet has written with the explicit aim of explaining the words of another Prophet, or his own; and also since we cannot infer[38]

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[34] Lit.: have interpreted

[35] Gen. 48.1-2.

[36] Lit.: unique.

[37] See 7 3 1-13, 5.1-22.

[38] Lit.: conclude.

the mind of one Prophet, Apostle, etc., on the basis of the mind of another, except in matters having to do with the conduct of life, as we have evidently shown already.[39] Yet not when they speak about theoretical matters or when they narrate miracles or histories.[40]

3 [57] I can show this, besides—namely, that many unexplainable speeches occur in Sacred Writ—by some examples; but I would rather pass over them at present and go on to the rest of the things that are left to be noted—what difficulty this true method of interpreting Scripture has in addition, or what might be missing in it.

¶10 [58] There arises in this method, besides, another difficulty, on the basis of the fact that it requires case histories[41] of all the books of Scripture, the greatest part of which we are ignorant of. For either we are quite ignorant of the authors or (if you would rather) Writers of many of the books, or we have doubts about them, as I will amply show in the following.[42]

2 Nor, furthermore, do we know on what occasion or at what time these books whose Writers we are ignorant of were written.

3 We do not know, besides, into whose hands they all fell, nor in whose manuscripts so many variant readings were found, nor, finally, whether there were not still other readings among other manuscripts°.

4 [59] I have indicated briefly in its place,[43] however, what is relevant for knowing all these things: yet some of these I have advisedly omitted there; they now remain to be considered here.

5 If we read a book containing unbelievable or impenetrable[44] matters or one written in very obscure terms, and we do not recognize its author, nor even at what time and on what occasion it was written, we will endeavor in vain to become more certain of its true sense.

6 [60] For being ignorant of all these things, we can hardly know what the author intended or could have intended, when, on the contrary, **{110}** these things being thoroughly known, we determine our thoughts so that we are not predisposed by any prejudice—so that we do not attribute to the author, or to the one for whose sake the author has written, more or less than what is just, and so that we are not thinking of any things other than those which the author could have had in mind or which the time and the occasion required.

7 This, I figure, is established for everyone.

8 [61] For very often it happens that we read very similar histories[45] in different books, about which we make quite a different judgment—in accordance with the diversity of opinions which we have of the writers.

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[39] See 7.5.16-17.

[40] Or: stories.

[41] Lit.: a history of the cases.

[42] See Ch. 8-10.

[43] See 7.4 1-2

[44] Lit : unperceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[45] Or: stories. Likewise in 7 10.10ff.

9 I know that I once read in some book[46] that a man whose name was Orlando the Furious used to ride some monster in the air and fly over whatever regions he liked and butcher a huge number of human beings and giants single-handed, and other phantasms of this sort, which are plainly impenetrable[47] by a plan of understanding.

10 [62] I read a history[48] very similar to this in Ovid about Perseus,[49] moreover; and, finally, another in the Books of Judges and Kings about Samson (who butchered thousands of human beings alone and unarmed)[50] and Elijah, who flew through the air with fiery horses and a chariot and ultimately entered heaven.[51]

11 These histories, I say, are plainly very similar, and still we make a quite dissimilar judgment on each one. Namely, the first writer° only meant to write trifles; the second, however, political matters; the third, finally, sacred ones; and we persuade ourselves of this from no other cause than on account of the opinions we have of their writers.

12 [63] Accordingly, it is established that acquaintance with authors who have written of matters that are obscure or impenetrable[52] to the understanding is necessary in the first place, if we want to interpret their writings. Because of these same things as well, for us to be able to elicit true histories on the basis of the variant readings of obscure ones, it is necessary to know in whose copy these readings were found, and whether still others were never discovered among other men of greater authority.

¶11 [64] Another difficulty of interpreting some books of Scripture by this method, finally, is in the fact that we do not have them in the same language in which they were first written.

2 For the Gospel in accordance with Matthew, and without a doubt the Epistle to the Hebrews as well, were by common opinion written in Hebrew: these versions are no longer extant.

3 Concerning the Book of Job, however, what language it was written in is doubted.

4 Ibn Ezra affirms in his commentaries[53] {111} that it was translated out of another language into Hebrew and that this is the cause of its obscurity.

5 Of the apocryphal books, I say nothing, since they are of a quite dissimilar authorship.[54]

6 [65] Yet these are all the difficulties of this method of interpreting Scripture by the history that we can have of it which I would undertake to narrate, and which I deem to be so great that I would not hesitate to affirm that either we are ignorant of the true sense of Scripture in very many passages, or else we guess at it without certainty.

7 [66] Be that as it may, on the other hand this ought to be noted once more: all

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[46] Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* X.66.
[47] Lit.: unperceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."
[48] Or: story. Likewise in 7 10.11f.
[49] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV.614-16.
[50] Jud. 14:19, 16:26-30; cf. 15:14-16.
[51] II Ki. 2:11.
[52] Lit.: unperceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."
[53] Ibn Ezra on Job 2.11.
[54] Or: authority.

these difficulties can only impede our arriving at the mind of the Prophets in connection with impenetrable[55] things, which can only be imagined, yet not in connection with things we can both arrive at by understanding and easily form a clear concept of.[56] For things that are by their nature easily perceived can never be said so obscurely that they are not easily understood—in line with that proverb, To one who understands, a word[57] is sufficient.

8 [67] Euclid, who wrote only of quite simple matters, understandable in the greatest degree, is easily explained by anyone in whatever language. For, that we may arrive at his mind and be certain of his true sense, there is no need to have a full knowledge of the language in which he wrote, but only a very common and almost childish one, nor to know the life, studies and mores of the author, nor in what language, for whom or when he wrote, nor the fortune of the book or its variant readings, or how or, finally, by which[58] council it was accepted.

9 [68] And what is said here of Euclid is to be said of all who have written of matters that are by their nature penetrable;[59] and so we conclude that, from the history that we can have of it, we can easily arrive at the mind of Scripture concerning the moral lessons and be certain of its true sense.

10 For the lessons of true piety are expressed in the words used most, since they are very common and no less simple and easy for the understanding. And since true salvation and blessedness consists of true acquiescence of the spirit, and we truly acquiesce only in things we understand very clearly, [69] hence it very evidently follows that we can arrive for certain at the mind of Scripture in connection with matters that are salutary and necessary for blessedness. Therefore, there is no reason° why we should be so worried about the remaining things. For, since for the most part we cannot embrace the remaining things by reason and understanding, they are matters more of curiosity than {112} of utility.

11 With these things, I figure I have shown the true method of interpreting Scripture and have sufficiently explained my tenet concerning it.

12 [70] Besides, I do not doubt that each now sees that this method requires no light besides the natural light° itself.

13 For the nature and virtue of this light consists mainly in this: it deduces and concludes obscure things by legitimate inferences[60] on the basis of what is recognized, or given as recognized; and there is nothing else that this method of ours requires. And although we grant that it is not sufficient for investigating with certainty everything that occurs in the Bible, still that arises not from a lack in it, but from the fact that the way that it teaches as being true and correct has never been cultivated nor trodden by human beings; and so, with the succession of time, it has been made quite arduous

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[55] Lit.: unperceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[56] "Cf. Annotation 8." Spinoza's note.

[57] Lit.: the saying. Spinoza substitutes the participle "understanding" (*intelligenti*) for "wise" (*sapienti*) in the more familiar formulation as found in Terence, *Phormion* III.541, and Plautus, *Persa* V.729

[58] Lit.: whose. Cf. 10.2.60.

[59] Lit.: perceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[60] Lit.: consequences.

and almost impassable, as I deem to be very clearly established from those same difficulties that I have been referring to.

14 [71] It is now left to examine the tenets of those who disagree with us.

15 The one that ought to be examined here first is the tenet of those who state that the natural light does not have the force for interpreting Scripture, but that what is most required for this is a supernatural light. What this light may be besides the natural one, however, I leave to them to be explained.

16 [72] I, at least, cannot conjecture anything else but that they meant to confess in more obscure terms as well that, for the most part, they doubted the true sense of Scripture. For if we pay attention to their explanations, we will find that they contain nothing above the natural—indeed, they are nothing but mere conjectures.

17 Let them be compared, if you will, with the explanations of those who frankly confess that they do not have any light besides the natural one, and their explanations will plainly be found to be very similar—human ones, long thought out and discovered with some° labor. [73] As for their saying that the natural light is not sufficient for this, moreover, it is established that it is false, both from the fact that we have already demonstrated—that any difficulty in interpreting Scripture has not arisen from the lack of strength of the natural light, but only from the sloth (I would not say malice) of human beings who have neglected a history of Scripture when they could have devised one—and also from the fact that (as, unless I am duped, everyone confesses) this light is a supra-natural gift granted only to the faithful.

18 [74] Yet the Prophets and the Apostles used to preach not only to the faithful but mostly to the faithless and the impious, who thus were capable of understanding the mind of the Prophets and the Apostles.

19 Otherwise the Prophets and Apostles would have seemed {113} to be preaching to little children and infants, not to men endowed with reason. And Moses would have prescribed laws in vain if they could not have been understood except by the faithful, who need no law.

20 Therefore, those who seek a supra-natural light for understanding the mind of the Prophets and the Apostles are surely seen to need the natural light. I am therefore far from figuring that such men have a divine, supra-natural gift.

21 [75] Maimonides' tenet was plainly different.[61] For he felt that each passage of Scripture admitted various, indeed contrary senses, and that we are not certain of the truth of any unless we knew that that passage as we interpret it contains nothing that does not agree with reason or conflicts with it. For if it is found to conflict with reason in its literal sense, however clear it might seem, he still judges that the passage is to be interpreted otherwise; [76] and this is what he indicates as clearly as possible in *Guide of the Perplexed*[62] II.25. For he says, **דע כי אין בריחתינו מן המאמר בקדמות העולם מפני הכתובים אשר באו בתורה בהיות העולם מחודש כי אין הכתובים המורים על חדוש העולם יותר מן הכתובים המורים על היות השם גשם ולא שערי הפירוש סתומים בפנינו ולא נמנעים לנו בעניין חדוש העולם אבל היה אפשר לנו לפרשם כמו**

[61] Lit : other

[62] Spinoza uses the Hebrew title, *Moreh Nevuchim*.

**שעשינו בהרחקת הגשמות ואולי זה יותר קל הרבה והינו יכולים יותר לפרש הפסוקים ההם ולהעמיד קדמות העולם כמו שפירשנו הפסוקים והרחקנו היותו יתברך גשם וגו**

*Know that we have not shunned saying that the world has been from eternity on account of the texts that occur in Scripture about the creation of the world. For the texts that teach that the world is created are not more numerous° than those that teach that God is corporeal. And the approaches for explaining those that are found in this material about the world's creation are not closed to us, nor even blocked, but we could have explained them just as we did when we removed corporeality from God. And perhaps this would have been much easier to do, and we could have explained them and established the world's eternity more advantageously, than when we explained the Scriptures so as to remove blessèd God from being corporeal:*[63] *Yet two causes move me not to do this and not to believe it* (that the world is eternal)*: first, since it is established by a clear demonstration that God is not corporeal, and it is necessary to explain all those passages whose literal sense conflicts with the demonstration; for it is certain that they then necessarily have* (another) *explanation* (besides the literal one). *Yet the world's* **{114}** *eternity is not shown by any demonstration. And so it is not necessary to do violence*[64] *to the Scriptures and explain them on account of an apparent opinion to whose contrary we could incline so long as some reason induces us. The second cause is that believing that God is incorporeal does not conflict with the foundations of the Law, etc. But to believe the world's eternity in the same mode in which it seemed to Aristotle, destroys the law from its foundation, etc.*

22 [77] These are Maimonides' words, from which what I have just said evidently follows. For if it were established for him by reason that the world is eternal, he would have no doubts about twisting and explaining Scripture so as ultimately to seem to teach the very same thing.

23 Indeed, he would at once be certain that Scripture, though everywhere disapproving openly, still means to teach this eternity of the world. And so, he could not be certain about the true sense of Scripture, however clear, so long as he could doubt the truth of the matter or so long as the truth about it was not established for him.

24 For so long as the truth of the matter is not established, we do not know whether the matter agrees with reason or instead conflicts with it. And consequently we do not know whether the literal sense is true or false either.

25 [78] If this tenet were true, I would absolutely grant that we need another light besides the natural one for interpreting Scripture.

26 For almost nothing that is found in Holy Writ is able to be deduced from principles recognized by the natural light (as we have already shown);[65] and so nothing is able to be established for us about its truth by force of the natural light; and consequently we would not necessarily need the true sense and mind of Scripture either, but only another light for this.

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[63] The foregoing Hebrew citation stops here with the Hebrew equivalent of *etc.*

[64] Lit.: force.

[65] See 7 3 4-13.

27 [79] Furthermore, if this tenet were true, it would follow that the vulgar, who are for the most part ignorant of demonstrations or are unable to have the leisure for them, will not be able to admit anything about Scripture except on the authority and attestations of those who philosophize; and, consequently, they will have to suppose that Philosophers cannot err about Scripture's interpretation: surely this would be a new Church authority and a new kind of priests or Pontiffs, which the vulgar would ridicule rather than venerate. [80] And although our method requires a knowledge of the Hebrew language, whose study the vulgar cannot have the leisure for either, still no such thing can be objected against us. For the vulgar among the Jews and gentiles, to whom the Prophets and Apostles once preached and wrote, understood the language of the Prophets and Apostles, {115} on the basis of which they perceived the mind of the Prophets as well—yet not the reasons for the things they preached, which, on the basis of the tenet of Maimonides, they also had to have known so as to be able to grasp the mind of the Prophets.

28 [81] By reason of our method, therefore, it does not necessarily follow that the vulgar acquiesced in the testimony of the interpreters. For I have shown that the vulgar were competent in the language of the Prophets and Apostles. Yet Maimonides does not show any of the vulgar who understood the causes of matters, on the basis of which they might perceive their[66] mind.

29 [82] And as for what concerns today's vulgar, we have already shown[67] that all things necessary for salvation can still be easily perceived in any language on account of their being so common and usual, although the reasons for them are ignored; and the vulgar acquiesce in this perception, not in the attestation of interpreters. And as for what concerns the remaining things, in these they follow the same fortune as the learnèd.

30 [83] But let us return to Maimonides' tenet and examine it more accurately.

31 First, he supposes that the Prophets agreed among themselves in all things and were the highest caliber° Philosophers and Theologians. For he means that they came to their conclusions on the basis of the truth of the matter. Yet we have shown in Chapter 2 that this is false.[68]

32 [84] Furthermore, he supposes that the sense of Scripture cannot be established on the basis of Scripture itself. For the truth of the matters is not established on the basis of Scripture itself (inasmuch as it does not demonstrate anything and does not teach the matters it speaks of through their definitions and first causes). Therefore, on the basis of Maimonides' tenet, its true sense cannot be established on its own basis, and so is not to be sought from it.

33 Now, that this is also false is established on the basis of this Chapter. For we have shown, both by reason and by examples, that the sense of Scripture is established solely on the basis of Scripture itself and is to be sought solely from it, even when it speaks of matters recognized by the natural light.

34 [85] He supposes, finally, that we are permitted to explain and twist the words of

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[66] I.e., the Prophets' and the Apostles'.

[67] See 4.2.2, 4.1-10.

[68] See 2.7.12-10.2.

Scripture in accordance with our preconceived opinions, and deny the literal sense even though it is very transparent or express, and change it into any other.

35 No one does not see that, besides the fact that it conflicts diametrically with the things we have demonstrated in this Chapter and others, this license is excessive and rash. [86] But let us grant him this great freedom: what ultimately does it accomplish?

36 Nothing, surely. For what is indemonstrable and makes up the greatest part of Scripture, we could not for this reason investigate {116} or explain or interpret by this norm—while, on the contrary, by following our method, we can explain very many things of this kind and discuss them securely, as we have already shown both by reason and by the fact itself. The sense of things that are by their nature intelligible,[69] moreover, is easily elicited solely on the basis of the context of the speeches, as we have also shown already.[70]

37 Therefore, this[71] method is plainly useless.

38 [87] Add that all the certainty about the sense of Scripture which the vulgar can have by a straightforward reading and which all can have by following another method, he plainly takes away from them.

39 On that account, I have exploded this tenet of Maimonides as harmful, useless, and absurd.

40 [88] Further, as for what concerns the tradition of the Pharisees, we have already said that it is not consistent with itself.[72] The authority of the Roman Pontiff, moreover, needs more lucid attestation. And I disapprove of it from no other cause.

41 For if they could show it to us on the basis of Scripture itself, equally as reliably[73] as the Pontiffs of the Jews once did, it would not in any way° move me that heretical and impious men° have been found among Roman Pontiffs, since heretical and impious men° were once found among the Pontiffs of the Hebrews as well, who acquired the Pontificate by sinister means yet in whose possession—on the basis of a commandment of Scripture—was the highest power to interpret the law.

42 See Deuteronomy 17:11-12, 33:10, and Malachi 2:8.

43 [89] Yet since they have shown us no such attestation, their authority remains very suspect. And lest someone who is deceived by the example of the Pontiff of the Hebrews were to deem that the Catholic religion needs a Pontiff as well, it ought to be noted that, since the laws of Moses were the public rights of the Fatherland, they necessarily needed to be preserved by some public authority. For if each had the freedom to interpret the public rights by his own decision, then no public right could subsist; but by this same token it would be dissolved at once, and the public right would be a private right.

44 [90] Yet there is quite another reason for Religion.

45 For since it does not consist in outward actions so much as in a simplicity and truthfulness of spirit, it is part° of no public right and authority.

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[69] Lit.: perceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[70] See 7.3.1-13

[71] I.e., Maimonides'.

[72] See 7.5.23-24

[73] Lit.: certainly

46 For simplicity and truthfulness of spirit are not infused in human beings by an imperium of laws, nor by public authority; and absolutely no one can be compelled by force or by the laws to become blessèd; but for this are required pious and brotherly admonition, good education and, above all, proper[74] and free {117} judgment.

47 [91] Since, therefore, the highest right to think freely, even about Religion, is in each's possession, and it cannot be conceived that anyone can yield this right, therefore the highest right and highest authority to judge Religion freely, and consequently to explain and interpret it for oneself, will also be in each's possession. [92] For the highest authority to interpret laws and the highest judgment about public matters is in the magistrates' possession from no other cause but that they[75] are part° of the public right. And so the highest authority to explain Religion and judge it will be in each's possession from the same cause: that it is part° of each's right.

48 [93] A Roman Pontiff's authority to interpret religion, therefore, is far from being able to be concluded on the basis of the authority of the Pontiff of the Hebrews to interpret the laws of the Fatherland—since, on the contrary, it is more easily concluded on that basis that each has that authority° in the greatest degree. [94] Yet here too we can show that our method of interpreting Scripture is the best.

49 For since the greatest authority to interpret Scripture resides in each, therefore the norm for interpreting has to be nothing besides the natural light common to everyone—not any light above nature and not any external authority. It does not have to be so difficult that it could only be directed by the most acute Philosophers either, but has to be accommodated to the natural and common mental cast and capacity of human beings, as we have shown ours to be.[76]

50 For we have seen that those difficulties that our method has now, have arisen from human carelessness, not from the nature of the method.

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[74] Or: one's own.

[75] I e., the authority and judgment.

[76] See 7.11.21-29.

# *CHAPTER 8*

## In which it is shown that the Pentateuch and the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings are not autographic. Furthermore, it is inquired whether the Writers of all of them were many or only one, and who it was

¶1 In the preceding Chapter, we have dealt with the foundations and principles of knowledge of the Scriptures, and shown them to be nothing else but the straightforward history of them.[1]

2 Although this history° is necessary first and foremost, however, the Ancients still neglected it; or else if they did write it or hand it down, it has perished with the injury of the times, and consequently a great part of the foundations and principles of this knowledge {118} has been lost.

3 [2] So far this might have been tolerable, if posterity had continued within the true limits and in good faith handed down to their successors the few things they had received or discovered, and did not toss off new ones out of their own brain. From this it came about that Scripture's history remained not only imperfect, but also faultier—that is, the foundations of knowledge of the Scriptures were not only too few for it to be able to be constructed on them entirely, but also flawed.

4 [3] Improving these and removing the common prejudices of Theology has to do with my design.

5 Yet I am afraid that I am coming too late to attempt this. For the matter has already reached so far that human beings do not suffer being corrected in this; but what they have embraced under a show of religion, they defend tenaciously. And there does not seem to be any place left for reason except among very few (as compared with the rest), so widely have these prejudices occupied the minds of human beings.

6 Still, I will strive and not give up testing out the matter, inasmuch as there is nothing to say° why this matter is to be completely despaired over.

7 [4] That I may show it in order, moreover, I will begin from the prejudices about the true writers of the Sacred Books—and, first, concerning the Writer of the Pentateuch. Almost everyone has believed him to be Moses; indeed, so tenaciously have the Pharisees defended this that they consider anyone who seems to feel otherwise a

[1] I.e , of the Scriptures.

heretic; and because of this, Ibn Ezra, a Man of freer mental cast and no small erudition, and the first of all whom I have read to have noticed this prejudice, did not dare to express his mind openly, except to indicate the matter in rather obscure words: I am not afraid to render them clearer here and show the matter itself plainly.

8 [5] Accordingly, Ibn Ezra's words, which are found° in his comments on Deuteronomy, are these.

9 **בעבר הירדן וגו ואם תבין סוד השנים עשר גם ויכתוב משה והכנעני אז בארץ בהר יהוה יראה גם הנה ערשו ערש ברזל תכיר האמת** *'Beyond the Jordan,' etc. Provided that you understand the mystery of the twelve, as well as 'And Moses wrote the law,' 'And the Canaanite was then in the land,' 'On God's mountain it will be revealed,' also 'Behold his bed, a bed of iron' as well, then you will know the truth.*[2]

10 [6] With these few words°, however, he indicates—and at the same time shows—that it was not Moses who wrote the Pentateuch but someone else who lived long after, and furthermore that the book Moses wrote was another one.

11 To show these things, I say, he notes first the very preface to Deuteronomy, {**119**} which could not have been written by Moses, who did not cross the Jordan.

12 [7] Second, he notes that Moses' whole book was written down rather elegantly on the mere circumference of one altar (see Dt. 27[3] and Josh. 8:31, etc.), which, on the basis of a report of the Rabbis,[4] consisted of only twelve stones. From this it follows that Moses' book was of far less bulk than the Pentateuch. This, I say, I deem this author to have meant to signify by *the mystery of the twelve*—unless perhaps he understood those twelve curses that are in the aforementioned chapter of Deuteronomy,[5] which perhaps he believed were not written down in the book of the law—and this on account of the fact that, besides the writing down of the law, Moses moreover bade the Levites to recite those curses,[6] that they might commit the populace by their swearing to observe the laws written down .

13 Or perhaps he meant to signify the last chapter of Deuteronomy,[7] concerning the death of Moses: this chapter consists of twelve verses.

14 But these things, and what others babble besides, there is no need to examine more carefully here.

15 Third, he notes further that it is said in Deuteronomy 31:9 **כתוב משה את התורה** *And Moses wrote the law.* These words cannot be Moses' but are another Writer's, who is narrating Moses' deeds and writings.

16 [9] Fourth, he notes the passage in Genesis 12:6 where, while narrating that Abraham toured the land of the Canaanites, the Historian adds that *the Canaanite was in the land at that time.* By these words, he clearly pinpoints the time at which he wrote these things.

17 And so these things had to have been written after the death of Moses and

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[2] Ibn Ezra on Dt. 1:2
[3] Dt. 27:2-8.
[4] See Rashi on Dt. 27:2.
[5] Dt 27:15-26.
[6] Dt. 27 14
[7] Dt 34:1-12.

when the Canaanites had already been expelled and no longer possessed those regions. Ibn Ezra signifies this same thing as well when commenting on this passage: **והכנעני אז בארץ יתכן שארץ כנען תפשה מיד אחר ואם אננו כן יש לו סוד והמשכיל ידום** '*And the Canaanite was then in the land.' It seems that Canaan* (a grandson of Noah) *took the land of Canaan when it was possessed by another. If this is not true, there is some mystery in the matter here, and let him who understands it be silent.*[8]

18 That is, if Canaan invaded those regions, then the sense will be, *the Canaanite was already in that land by then*—excluding the time past, when it was inhabited by another nation.

19 Yet if Canaan was the first to have cultivated that land (as follows from Gen. 10),[9] then the Text pinpoints the present time—the writer's—and so not Moses', at whose time they no doubt still possessed those regions. And this is the mystery that he recommends being silent about.

20 [10] **{120}** Fifth, he notes that in Genesis 22:14 Mount Moriah[10] is called the mountain of God: this name it did not have until after it had been dedicated for the building of the temple. And this choice of a mountain had not yet been made at the time of Moses. For Moses indicates no place chosen by God, but on the contrary predicts that God will someday choose some place where the name of God will be imposed.

21 [11] Sixth, finally, he notes that in the narrative of Og, King of Bashan, in Deuteronomy 3, these words are interposed: *Og, King of Bashan, alone remained of the rest of the giants:*[11] *behold, his bed was an iron bed; certainly it is* (the bed) *that is in Rabbah of the children of Ammon, nine cubits long, etc.*[12]

22 This parenthesis indicates as clearly as possible that the Writer of these books lived long after Moses. For this mode of speaking belongs only to someone who is narrating very ancient matters and is indicating what remains of the matters, so as to win faith. And, without a doubt, this bed was first discovered at the time of David, who subdued this city, as is narrated in II Samuel 12:30.

23 [12] Yet not only this, but also a little further on this same Historian inserts the same thing in the words of Moses: *Jair, the son of Manasseh, took the whole jurisdiction*[13] *of Argov up to the border of Geshur and Maacah; and he called those places, along*[o] *with Bashan, by his name— the villages of Jair—up to this day.*[14]

24 The Historian, I say, adds these things to explain the words of Moses which he had just related, namely: *And the rest of Gilead and the whole of Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half tribe of Manasseh—the whole jurisdiction of Argov*

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[8] Ibn Ezra on Gen. 12:6.

[9] Gen. 10:15-19

[10] "See Annotation 9." Spinoza's note.

[11] "N.B. The Hebrew **רפאים** *refaim* signifies 'condemned,' and also seems from I Chr. 20 to be a proper name. And therefore I deem that here it signifies some family." Spinoza's note. See I Chr.

[12] Dt. 3:11.

[13] Here, and in 8.1.*24*-25, Spinoza uses *jurisdictio*, rather than *jus*. Cf Index of Terms, s.v. "right."

[14] Dt. 3·14

*under the whole of Bashan, which is called the Land of the Giants.*[15]

25 [13] The Hebrews at the time of this Writer knew, without doubt, what the villages of Jair of the tribe of Judah were, yet not by the name of the jurisdiction of Argov, or of the Land of the Giants; and therefore he is compelled to explain what these places were which were called thus in antiquity, and at the same time to give the reason why they would be designated in his time by the name of Jair, who was of the tribe of Judah, not, in truth, Manasseh (see I Chr. 2:21-22).

26 [14] With these things, we have explained Ibn Ezra's tenet,[16] as well as the passages of the Pentateuch which he brings in to confirm it.

27 Be that as it may, he did not note everything, nor the chief things; for many things are left to be noted of even greater importance in these books.

28 [15] Namely, first, that the Writer of these books not only speaks about {**121**} Moses in the third person, but moreover attests to many things about him: Viz., *God spoke with Moses.*[17] *God spoke with Moses face to face.*[18] *Moses was the humblest of all human beings* (Num. 12:3). *Moses was gripped by anger against the leaders of the army*[19] (Num. 31:14). *Moses, the divine man* (Dt. 33:1). *Moses, the servant of God, died.*[20] *Never has there existed a Prophet in Israel just like Moses,*[21] *etc.*

29 [16] Yet on the contrary, in Deuteronomy, where the law is written down which Moses had explained to the populace and which he had written, Moses speaks and narrates his deeds in the first person. Namely, *God spoke to me* (Dt. 2:1, 17, etc.), *I prayed to God,*[22] *etc.*

30 Except that afterward the historian, after he has reported the words of Moses, goes on to narrate at the end of the book—speaking again in the third person—how Moses handed down this law (the one he had explained) to the populace in writing and newly[23] admonished them, and how at last he ended his life.[24]

31 All these things, namely, the mode of speaking, the attestations, and the very context of the whole history,[25] plainly suggest that these books were written by another, not by Moses himself.

32 [17] Second, it also ought to be noted that not only is it narrated in this history how Moses died, how he was buried, and how he cast the Hebrews into mourning for thirty days, but moreover that, by a comparison made of him with all the Prophets who lived afterward, it is said that he excelled them all.[26]

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[15] Dt. 3:13.
[16] Or: sentence. See 8.1.9
[17] Ex. 6:2, etc.
[18] Ex. 33:11.
[19] See note on "army" at 1.20.18.
[20] Dt. 34:5.
[21] Dt. 34:10.
[22] Dt. 9:26.
[23] Or perhaps: in a very novel way˚.
[24] Dt. 27 1-34:12.
[25] Or: story. Likewise in 8.1.32.
[26] Dt. 34·5-8, 10-12.

33 *There has not existed ever*, it says, *a Prophet in Israel just like Moses, whom God knew*[27] *face to face*.[28]

34 Surely Moses himself could not have given this attestation about himself, nor could someone else who followed him immediately, but someone who lived after many generations, especially since the historian speaks of the time past, namely, *Never has there existed a Prophet, etc.*[29]

35 And of the grave, that *no one knew it up to this day*.[30]

36 [18] Third, it is to be noted that some places were not indicated by the names they obtained while Moses was alive, but by others, by which they were designated shortly afterward.

37 As that Abraham *pursued* enemies *as far as Dan* (see Gen. 14:14): this town did not obtain this name until long after Joshua's death (see Jud. 18:29).

38 [19] Fourth, that the Histories[31] were carried well beyond the life of Moses.

39 For in Exodus 16:35[32] it is narrated that the children of Israel ate Manna for forty years until they came to an inhabited land—until they came to the edge of the land of {122} Canaan—namely, up to the time of which it speaks in Joshua 5:12.

40 In Genesis 36:31, it is said as well, *These are the kings who ruled in Edom, before a king ruled in the children of Israel*. Here, without a doubt, the historian is narrating which kings the Edomites had before David subdued them[33] and constituted governors in Edom itself.

41 (See II Sam. 8:14.)

42 [20] Accordingly, from all these things it appears more clearly than the light at noon that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone else, who lived many generations after Moses. But if you don't mind, let us pay attention moreover to the books that Moses himself did write and which are cited in the Pentateuch. For from these themselves, it will be established that they were other than the Pentateuch.

43 [21] First, accordingly, it is established from Exodus 17:14 that, on the basis of God's command, Moses wrote about the war against Amalek. In what book, however, it is not established from that same chapter. Yet in Numbers 21:14,[34] some book is cited which is called *The Wars of God*, and in this book, without a doubt, are narrated this war against Amalek and, besides, all the encampments as well (which the author of the Pentateuch testifies at Num. 33:2 were written down by Moses).

44 [22] Besides, something° is established in Exodus 24:4, 7 about another book, which is called **ספר הברית** *The Book of the Compact*,[35] which he read before the Israelites when they first entered the compact with God. Yet this book or this epistle

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[27] Elsewhere: recognized. Likewise in 8.1.35.

[28] Dt 34:10. Spinoza's Latin translation of the Hebrew differs somewhat from that in 8.1.28, 34.

[29] See note to 8 1.33.

[30] Dt. 34:6.

[31] Or: Stories.

[32] Gebhardt has erroneously 16:34.

[33] "Cf. Annotation 10." Spinoza's note.

[34] Gebhardt's text has erroneously 21:12.

[35] "N.B. ספר *sefer* in Hebrew more often signifies a list [or epistle] or a parchment." Spinoza's note.

contained very few things: the laws or biddings of God which are narrated from Exodus 20:22 up to Exodus 24, which no one who reads the aforementioned chapter with some sound judgment and without partiality will deny.

45 [23] For there it is narrated that, at the same time that Moses understood the sentiment[36] of the populace concerning the compact to be entered with God, he at once wrote down God's speeches and biddings; and in the morning light, after some ceremonies had been performed, he read aloud to the assembly as such the conditions of the compact to be entered into, to which—once they were read aloud and, without a doubt, grasped[37] by the plebs as such—the populace bound themselves with complete consent.

46 Therefore, on the basis of the brevity of the time in which it was written down, as well as on the basis of the reason for the compact to be entered into, it follows that this book contained nothing besides the few things I have just said.

47 [24] Finally, it is established that in the fortieth year from the exodus from Egypt, Moses explained all the laws he had given°[38] (see Dt. 1:5), and obligated the populace to them anew (see Dt. 29:14), and at last {123} wrote the book that contained these explained laws and this new compact (see Dt. 31:9); and this was called *The Book of the Law of God*, which Joshua afterward enlarged—by the narrating of a compact by which the populace at his time obligated themselves in full and which they entered into with God a third time° (see Josh. 24:25-26).

48 [25] Yet since we have no book that contains this compact of Moses' together with the compact of Joshua's, it is necessarily to be granted that this book has perished, or else° to go insane with the Aramaic paraphrast Jonathan and twist the words of Scripture at one's discretion. For, moved by this difficulty, he would rather corrupt Scripture than confess his own ignorance.

49 [26] Namely, these words of the Book of Joshua (see 24:26): **ויכתב יהושע את הדברים האלה בספר תורת האלהים** *And Joshua wrote these words in The Book of the Law of God*, he has translated into Aramaic as follows: **וכתב יהושע ית פתגמיא האילן לאצנעינון בספר אוריתא דיהוה** *And Joshua wrote these words, and guarded them with The Book of the Law of God.*

50 [27] What do you do with those who see nothing except what they are willing to? What else is this, I say, but to deny Scripture itself and forge a new one out of one's own brain?

51 We therefore conclude that this Book of the Law of God which Moses wrote was not the Pentateuch, but quite another one, which the author of the Pentateuch inserted in order as his book: as this follows very plainly from the things just said, so it does from those to be said now.

52 [28] Namely, when it is narrated in the passage in Deuteronomy just cited[39] that Moses wrote the book of the law, the historian adds that Moses handed it over to the priests and that, besides, he bade them to read it aloud to all the populace at a certain

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[36] Elsewhere: tenet

[37] Lit.: perceived. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[38] Lit.: borne The Latin *legis lator* ("law bearer") has been translated throughout as "lawgiver."

[39] See 8.1 47.

time.[40] This shows that this book was of far less bulk than the Pentateuch, since it could be read through at one assembly so that it would be understood by all. [29] Nor is the fact to be passed over here that, out of all the books that Moses wrote, he bade them to keep and guard religiously this one of the second compact and the Song[41] (which he wrote afterward as well, so that the populace as such might learn it).

53 For since by the first compact he had obligated only those present who were party° to it, and by the second one all of their descendants as well (see Dt. 29:14-15), therefore he bade that the book of the second compact be kept religiously for future generations and, besides, the Song as well, which has to do with future generations especially. [30] Since, accordingly, it is not established that Moses wrote any other books besides these {124} and did not command posterity to keep any other one religiously besides the Booklet of the law with the Song, and furthermore many things occur in the Pentateuch which could not have been written by Moses, it follows that no one has any foundation for affirming that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch; but it is altogether contrary to reason.

54 [31] Yet perhaps someone will ask here: Didn't Moses also write other laws besides these when they were first revealed to him? That is, didn't he write any of the laws that he gave in the space of forty years besides those few that I said were contained in the book of the first compact?

55 [32] But to these things I answer that, although I grant that it seems compatible with reason that, at the same time and place in which Moses happened to communicate the laws, he also wrote them down, I still deny that we are permitted to affirm this because of it. For we have shown above[42] that nothing is to be established for us about such things except what is established on the basis of Scripture itself, or what is elicited by a legitimate inference[43] on the basis of its foundations alone, and not on the basis of what seems compatible with reason.

56 [33] Add that reason alone would not compel us to state this.

57 For perhaps the senate communicated to the populace Moses' edicts, which the historian afterward gathered and inserted in order in the history[44] of Moses' life.

58 Yet so much for the five books of Moses. [34] It is now time for us to examine the rest also.

59 The Book of Joshua is shown not to be autographic by similar reasons as well. For it is someone else who attests about Joshua that his fame was throughout the whole land (see 6:27), that he omitted none of the things that Moses had enjoined (see 8:35 and 11:15), that he grew old and called everyone to an assembly,[45] and that at last he rendered up his soul.[46]

60 [35] Furthermore, some things are also narrated which happened after his death.

[40] Dt 31:9-11

[41] Dt. 32:1-43, 44-47

[42] See 7.1.9-23

[43] Lit.: consequence.

[44] Or: story.

[45] Josh. 23:1, 2ff, 24:1ff.

[46] Josh 24:29.

61 Viz., that after his death the Israelites worshiped God so long as the old who knew him lived.[47]

62 And, in 16:10, that *they* (Ephraim and Manasseh) *did not expel the Canaanite who dwelt in Gezer, but* (he adds) *the Canaanite dwelt among Ephraim up to this day and was a tributary.*

63 [36] This is the very same thing that is narrated in the Book of Judges, chapter 1;[48] and the mode of speaking, *up to this day*, also shows that the Writer is narrating something ancient.[49] Similar to this as well is the Text of 15:63 about the children of Judah, and the history[50] of Caleb from 15:13.

64 [37] And the incident that is narrated in chapter 22 from verse 10, etc., {**125**} about the two and a half tribes that built an altar beyond the Jordan, also seems to have happened after Joshua's death—since in that whole history no mention is made of Joshua, but the populace alone considers waging war, sends ambassadors and awaits their answer, and at last approves the altar.

65 [38] Finally, it plainly follows on the basis of 10:14 that this book was written many generations after Joshua: For it is attested to as follows: *There was no other day just like that one, neither before nor after, when God* (sic) *would obey anyone*, etc.

66 If Joshua ever wrote that book, therefore, surely it was the one that is cited in 10:13—in that same history. [39] As for the Book of Judges, I believe no one of sound mind believes that it was written by the Judges themselves. For the epilogue to the whole History, which is in chapter 2,[51] clearly shows that the whole of it was written by one Historian alone.

67 Furthermore, since its Writer often admonishes that in those times there was no King in Israel,[52] there is no doubt that it was written after the kings had obtained the imperium.

68 [40] About the Books of Samuel, there is no reason° why we should delay for long either, since the history is carried on long after his life.

69 Still, I would only want it noted that this book was also written many generations after Samuel.

70 For in I Samuel 9:9, the Historian admonishes, through a parenthesis: *Earlier*[53] *in Israel, someone said as follows when he went to consult God, 'Go with us to the seer'; for one who nowadays is a prophet was earlier called a seer.*

71 [41] Finally, the Books of Kings, as is established from them, were excerpted from the books of the affairs of Solomon (see I Ki. 11:41), of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (see *idem* 14:19, 29), and of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.[54]

72 [42] Accordingly, we conclude that all these books that we have recounted up to

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[47] Josh. 24:31.

[48] Jud. 1:21, 27ff.

[49] Or: earlier. Cf. 8.1.72-73.

[50] Or: story. Likewise in 8.1.64, 66, 68.

[51] Jud. 2:6-23.

[52] Jud. 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25.

[53] Or. anciently. I.e., in former or ancient times. Likewise later in this verse.

[54] I Ki. 15:31, 16:5, 14, 20, 27.

now were apographic, and the things contained in them were narrated as ancient.[55]

73 If we now pay attention to the connection and argument of all these books, we will easily gather that they were all written by one and the same Historian, who wanted to write the antiquities of the Jews from their first origin down to the City's[56] first sacking.

74 [43] For these books are so connected with one another that, on this basis alone, we can discern that they contain only one narrative of one Historian.

75 For as soon as he stops narrating Moses' life, he goes over to the history[57] of Joshua as follows: *And it happened after Moses, the servant of God, died, that God said to Joshua, etc.*[58]

76 And when this one ends with the death of Joshua, {126} it begins the history of the Judges by the same transition and link, namely: *And it happened, after Joshua died, that the children of Israel inquired of God, etc.*[59]

77 [44] And to this book he annexes the Book of Ruth as an appendix, as follows: *And it happened in the days in which the Judges were judging that there was a famine in that land.*[60]

78 In the same mode, he also annexes to it the First Book of Samuel, at the end of which he goes on to the Second with his usual transition. And with the history of David not yet finished, he joins the First Book of Kings to it; and, going on to narrate the history of David, he at last annexes the Second Book by the same link.

79 [45] Furthermore, the context and order of the histories also indicates that there was only one Historian, who set a certain goal for himself: For he begins by narrating the first origins of the Hebrew nation, saying furthermore, in order, on what occasion and at what times Moses gave the laws and predicted many things in them. Furthermore, how they invaded the Promised Land in accordance with Moses' predictions (see Dt. 7): how once it was possessed they said farewell to the laws (Dt. 31:16) and many evils followed them from there (*ibid.*, vs. 17).

80 Furthermore, how they wanted to choose Kings (Dt. 17:14)—as they[61] too had cared for the laws, so matters had turned out favorably or unhappily for them (Dt. 28:36, 69)—until at last he narrates the ruin of the imperium, just as Moses had predicted it.

81 [46] Other things, however, which do nothing to confirm the law, he has either relegated completely to silence, or else° has sent the reader off to other Historians.

82 All these books therefore conspire as one, namely, in teaching the sayings and edicts of Moses and demonstrating them through the outcome of events.

83 [47] On the basis of these three things considered together, therefore—namely, the simplicity of the argument of all these books, the interconnection, and the fact that

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55 Or: earlier.

56 I.e , Jerusalem's.

57 Or: story Likewise in 8.1.76, 78f.

58 Josh. 1:1.

59 Jud. 1:1.

60 Ruth 1·1.

61 I.e., the kings.

they were written by someone else many generations after the things accomplished—we conclude, as I have just said, that they were all written by one Historian alone.

84 [48] Who he was, however, I cannot show so plainly; yet I suspect that he was Ezra, and some not inconsequential[62] things concur from which I make the conjecture.

85 For since the Historian (whom we now know to have been only one) carries the history[63] up to the freeing of Jehoiakin, and adds, moreover, that he banqueted the whole of his life at the King's table (that is, either Jehoiakin's or the son of Nebuchadnezzar's),[64] hence it follows that he was not anyone before Ezra.

86 [49] {127} Yet Scripture does not attest to anyone who flourished then except Ezra alone (see Ezra 7:10), that he applied his study to inquiring into and elaborating God's law, and that he was a Writer familiar with the Law of Moses (*ibid.*, vs. 6).

87 Therefore, I can suspect no one besides Ezra to have been the one who wrote these books.

88 [50] Furthermore, we see in this attestation about Ezra that he applied his study not only to inquiring into God's law but also to elaborating it; and in Nehemiah 8:9, it is said as well *that they read the book explicative of the law of God, and brought understanding and understood the Scripture.*

89 [51] Since, however, not only is the book of the law of Moses, or the greatest part of it, contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, but moreover many things are found inserted for a fuller explanation, hence I conjecture that the Book of Deuteronomy was that book of the law of God written, elaborated, and explained by Ezra which they read then.

90 [52] That many things are inserted in this book of Deuteronomy parenthetically for a fuller explanation, moreover, we have shown by two examples of this matter when we explained Ibn Ezra's tenet[65]—many other things of this note are found, as, for example, in 2:12: *And the Horites dwelt in Seir beforehand; however, the children of Esau drove them out and eliminated them from sight and dwelt in their place, just as Israel did in the land of its inheritance which God gave it.*

91 It explains verses 3 and 4 of the same chapter: namely, that the children of Esau occupied a Mount Seir that had come to them by inheritance, which was not uninhabited; but they invaded it, and struck down and eliminated from there the Horites who were inhabiting it before, just as the Israelites did to the Canaanites after the death of Moses.

92 [53] Things are also inserted parenthetically in the words of Moses' in 10:6-9. For no one does not see that verse 8, which begins, *At that time, God separated the tribe of Levi*, necessarily has to be related to verse 5, and not to the death of Aaron, which Ezra seems to have inserted here from no other cause but that Moses had said in this narrative of the calf that he prayed to God for Aaron's sake (see 9:20).

93 Furthermore, it explains that God chose for himself the tribe of Levi at the time of which Moses is speaking here, so as to show the cause of the choosing, and why the

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62 Lit.: slight.

63 Or: story.

64 II Ki. 25:27-30.

65 Or sentence. See 8 1 7-26.

Levites were not called to a portion of the inheritance; and, once this is done, it goes on to pursue the thread of the history[66] in Moses' words.

94 [54] Add to these things the book's {128} preface and all the passages that speak of Moses in the third person. And besides these he has added, or expressed in other words, many other things that are not able to be recognized by us now—without a doubt so that they would be more easily grasped[67] by the human beings of his age. [55] If, I say, we had the book itself of Moses' law, I do not doubt that we would find great discrepancy in the words, as well as in the order and reasons for the precepts.

95 For when I compare the Decalogue alone of this book with the Decalogue in Exodus (where its history is narrated professedly), I see that it disagrees with the latter in all these things. For the fourth precept[68] not only is commanded in another mode, but moreover is expanded at much more length. And the reason for it disagrees astronomically with the one that is brought up in the Decalogue in Exodus.

96 Finally, the order in which the tenth precept[69] is explained here is also other than in Exodus.

97 [56] These things, therefore, both here and in other passages, I figure were done by Ezra, as I have already said,[70] since he has explained the law of God to the human beings of his time; and therefore this is the Book of the Law of God as elaborated and explained by him. And of all the books that I have said he wrote, I deem that this was the first. This I conjecture since it contains the Laws of the Fatherland which the people needed most, and also since this book is not annexed by any link to a foregoing one, as are all the others, but begins with a detached speech: *These are the words of Moses, etc.*[71]

98 [57] Yet after he discharged this and taught the populace the laws, I believe, he then applied his study to writing down the entire history of the Hebrew nation—from the founding of the world down to the City's[72] final sacking, into which he inserted this Book of Deuteronomy in its place. And perhaps he called its first five books by the name of Moses since in them is chiefly contained his life, and it takes the name from what is more important. [58] And because of this as well, he called the sixth by the name of Joshua, the seventh Judges, the eighth Ruth, the ninth and perhaps tenth Samuel, and, finally, the eleventh and twelfth Kings.

99 As to whether, in truth, Ezra put the final hand to this work and completed it as he desired, see the following Chapter.

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[66] Or: story. Likewise in 8.1.95, 98.

[67] Lit.: perceived. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[68] Ex. 20 8-11, Dt. 5:12-15.

[69] Ex. 20·14, Dt. 5:18.

[70] See 8 1.64.

[71] Dt 1 1

[72] I.e., Jerusalem's.

# CHAPTER 9

## Other things are inquired into about the same Books, namely, whether Ezra put the final hand to them—and, furthermore, whether the marginal notes that are found in Hebrew codices were variant readings

¶1 {**129**} How much the previous discussion about the true Writer of these books helps for a complete understanding of them is easily gathered solely from those same passages that we have brought up to confirm our tenet about this matter and which otherwise have to seem very obscure to anyone.

2 But besides the Writer, other things remain to be attended to in these books which the common superstition does not let the vulgar detect.

3 [2] Of these, the chief one is that Ezra (I will take him for the Writer of the aforementioned books, until someone shows another to be more certain) did not put the final hand to the narratives contained in these books, or do anything else but gather the histories[1] from different writers and meanwhile simply write them down; and he left them to posterity not yet examined and ordered.

4 [3] I am unable to conjecture what causes would have impeded him from completing this work with all its numbers,[2] however (unless perhaps an untimely death).

5 Yet although we are deprived of the ancient[3] histories of the Hebrews, the matter itself is very evidently established on the basis of those very few fragments of them which we still have.

6 [4] For the history of Hezekiah from II Kings 18:17 was written down on the basis of the account of Isaiah,[4] just as it was found written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. For this whole history that is contained in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (see II Chr. 32, second-last vs.)[5] is narrated in the Book of Isaiah, in the same words as here, with only a very few exceptions.[6] Still, nothing else can be concluded from these things but that variant readings were found of this narrative of

[1] Or: stories. Likewise throughout 9.1.5-11.
[2] Cf. 9.1.14-19, 27-48.
[3] Or: earlier.
[4] Is. 36-39.
[5] II Chr. 32:32.
[6] "Cf. Annotation 11." Spinoza's note.

Isaiah's—unless someone would rather dream of mysteries here as well.

7 [5] Furthermore, the last chapter of II Kings[7] is also contained in the last chapter[8] and chapters 39 and 40 of Jeremiah.

8 Besides, we find II Samuel 7 written down in I Chronicles 17. Yet words in various passages are detected to have been so miraculously changed[9] that it is easily recognized that these two chapters were taken over from two different manuscripts **{130}** of the history of Nathan.

9 [6] Finally, the Genealogy of the Kings of Edom which is found° in Genesis 36:31ff. is deduced in the very same words in I Chronicles 1,[10] while yet it is established that the author of this book has taken the things he narrates from other Historians, not, in truth, from the twelve books we have attributed to Ezra.

10 [7] Therefore, there is no doubt that, if we had those same Historians, the matter itself would be established directly. But since, as I have said,[11] we are deprived of them, it only remains for us to examine the histories themselves—namely, their order and connection, the varied repetition, and, furthermore, the discrepancy in the computation of years—for us to be able to judge of the rest.

11 [8] Accordingly, let us weigh the chief histories, at least—and, first, that of Judah and Tamar, which is in Genesis 38.

12 The Historian begins narrating as follows: *It happened, moreover, at that time that Judah departed from his brothers.*[12]

13 This time is necessarily to be related to another one[13] that he has been speaking of immediately before°. Yet it can hardly be related to what is being dealt with immediately before° in Genesis.

14 For from that time, namely, when Joseph had been led into Egypt,[14] down to when the Patriarch Jacob proceeded there with his whole family,[15] we can enumerate no more than twenty-two years. [9] For when Joseph was sold by his brothers, he was seventeen years old°;[16] and when he was bidden to be called from prison by Pharaoh, he was thirty.[17] If to these are added the seven years of fertility and two years of famine,[18] together they make up twenty-two years.

15 [10] Yet no one can conceive that so many things could have happened in this interval of time.

16 Namely, that from the one wife he married then, Judah procreated three sons, one after another, of whom the firstborn, when he was permitted by age, married

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[7] I.e., II Ki. 25.
[8] I.e., Jer. 52.
[9] "Cf. Annotation 12." Spinoza's note
[10] I Chr. 1:35-52.
[11] See 9.1.5.
[12] Gen. 38:1.
[13] "Cf. Annotation 13." Spinoza's note.
[14] Gen. 37:28
[15] Gen. 46:1-7
[16] Gen. 37:2. Spinoza's Latin reads "was born seventeen years." Likewise at 9.1.19, *55*; cf. 9.1.35.
[17] Gen. 41:46.
[18] Gen. 41:29-31, 47-48, 53-54, 45:6.

Tamar; but on his death, the second one received her in matrimony, then also passed away;[19] and meanwhile, after all these things happened, Judah himself had a strange affair with Tamar, his own daughter-in-law, from whom he again received two sons—at one birth, no less—one of whom also became a parent within the aforementioned time.[20]

17 [11] Therefore, since all these things cannot be related to the time that is being dealt with in Genesis, the reference is necessarily to another time°[21] immediately before° in some other book. And therefore Ezra simply wrote down this history[22] as well and inserted it, not yet examined, in the rest.

18 [12] Yet it is necessarily to be confessed that not only this chapter, but the whole history of Joseph and Jacob have been excerpted and written down from different historians, {131} so little do we see its being consistent with itself.

19 For Genesis 47 narrates that, when Joseph first brought him to meet Pharaoh,[23] Jacob was 130 years old°,[24] from which, if the twenty-two are subtracted which passed in mourning on account of Joseph's absence,[25] and, besides, the seventeen years of Joseph's age when he was sold,[26] and, finally, the seven years that he served on account of Rachel,[27] he will be found to have been of a very advanced age—eighty-four years old°—when he married Leah;[28] and, on the other hand, Dinah was scarcely seven years old°[29] when she was raped at Shechem, and Simeon and Levi scarcely twelve and eleven when they despoiled that whole city and slew all its citizens with the sword.[30]

20 [13] I have no need here to recount everything in the Pentateuch.

21 If someone were only to pay attention to this fact—that all the precepts and histories in these five books are narrated indiscriminately and without order, and no account is taken of the times, and one and the same history is often repeated, sometimes differently—he will easily recognize that they were all gathered and accumulated indiscriminately, that they might be more easily examined and reduced to order afterward.

22 [14] Yet not only these things that are contained in the five books, but also the remaining histories down to the sacking of the city[31] which are contained in the remaining seven books, have been gathered in the same mode.

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[19] Gen. 38: 1-11.

[20] Gen. 38:12-29, 46:12.

[21] Lit.: another one is necessarily to be referred to.

[22] Or story. Likewise throughout 9.1.18-57.

[23] More or less lit.: when he first hailed Pharaoh with Joseph guiding. Gen. 46:28-47:12.

[24] Gen. 47:9.

[25] See 9.1 14

[26] Gen. 37:2

[27] Gen. 29.20

[28] Gen. 29:21-25.

[29] "Cf Annotation 14." Spinoza's note.

[30] Gen 34:2, 25-29

[31] I.e., of Jerusalem.

23 For who does not see that in Judges 2:6ff. a new Historian is brought in (who had written the accomplishments of Joshua as well) and his words simply written down.

24 For after our Historian has narrated in the last chapter of Joshua that Joshua passed away and was buried,[32] and promises in the first chapter of this book to narrate what happened after his death,[33] for what reason—if he meant to follow the thread of his history—could he have annexed the above things that he begins to narrate here?[34]

25 [15] So, too, I Samuel 17-18ff. has been taken over from another Historian, who felt there was another cause, quite different from the one that is narrated in chapter 16 of the same book,[35] for why David began to frequent the court of Saul. For he did not feel that David went to Saul after being called by him on the basis of his servants' counsel (as is narrated in ch. 16), but that, having by chance been sent by his father to his brothers in the camp, he then soon became known to Saul on the occasion of the victory he had over the Philistine Goliath, and was detained in the court.

26 I suspect the same thing in chapter 26 of the same book, {132} because the historian seems to be in accordance with someone else's opinion in narrating the same history there as is found° in chapter 24.

27 [16] But I dismiss this, and go on to examine the computation of years.

28 In I Kings 6,[36] it is said that Solomon built the temple in the 480th year after the exodus from Egypt; yet we conclude from the histories themselves that the number was far greater.

29 [17] For—

| | Years |
|---|---|
| Moses governed the populace in the desert | 40 |
| Joshua, who according to the tenet of Josephus[37] and others lived a hundred and ten years, is allotted no more than | 26 |
| Cushan Rishathaim held the populace in his° jurisdiction[38] | 8 |
| Othniel, son of Kenaz, judged[39] | 40 |
| Eglon, King of Moab, held an imperium over the populace[40] | 18 |
| Ehud and Shamgar judged them[41] | 80 |
| Jabin, King of Canaan, once again held the populace under his jurisdiction[42] | 20 |
| The populace had respite afterward[43] | 40 |

32 Josh. 24 29-30.
33 Jud. 1·1ff., 2:6ff.
34 "Cf. Annotation 15." Spinoza's note.
35 See I Sam. 16:14-23
36 I Ki. 6:1.
37 *Antiquities* V.117.
38 Jud. 4:2-3. Here and throughout this list, the Latin is *ditio*, rather than either *jus* or *jurisdictio*.
39 "Cf Annotation 16." Spinoza's note. See Jud. 3.4
40 Jud. 3.14
41 Jud 3:30.
42 Jud 4:2-3. Gebhardt's text has, erroneously, Jachin.
43 Jud 5:31.

They were next under the jurisdiction of Midian[44] ........................................7
They spent in freedom at the time of Gideon[45] ........................................40
Under the imperium of Abimelech, moreover[46] ........................................3
Tola, son of Pua, judged[47] ........................................23
Jair, moreover[48] ........................................22
The populace were once again in the jurisdiction of the Philistines and the Ammonites[49] ........................................18
Jephtha judged[50] ........................................6
Ibzan the Bethlehemite[51] ........................................7
Elon the Zebulunite[52] ........................................10
Abdon the Pirathonite[53] ........................................8
The populace were once again under the jurisdiction of the Philistines[54] ..........40
Samson judged[55] ........................................20
Eli, moreover[56] ........................................40
The populace were once again under the jurisdiction of the Philistines, before they were freed by Samuel[57] ........................................20
David ruled[58] ........................................40
Solomon before he built the temple[59] ........................................4
Yet all these numbers of years added up make up ........................................580

30 [18] {133} To these, furthermore, are to be added the years of the generation when the Republic of the Hebrews flourished after the death of Joshua until it was subjected by Cushan Rishathaim: the number, I believe, was large. For I cannot persuade myself that everyone who saw Joshua's portents perished at one moment right after his death; nor that their successors said farewell to the laws in one act and stroke, and fell from the highest virtue into the deepest iniquity and sloth; nor, finally, that Cushan Rishathaim subjected them right away.

31 [19] But since the specifics of these events require almost an age, there is no doubt that Scripture at Judges 2:7, 9-10, comprehends the histories of many years

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44 Jud. 6:1.
45 Jud. 8:28.
46 Jud. 9:22.
47 Jud. 10:2.
48 Jud. 10·3.
49 Jud. 10:8.
50 Jud. 12:7.
51 Jud. 12:9.
52 Jud. 12:11.
53 Jud. 12:14.
54 Jud 13:1.
55 "Cf. Annotation 17." Spinoza's note. See Jud. 15:20.
56 I Sam. 4:18.
57 I Sam 7:2ff
58 I Ki. 2·11.
59 I Ki. 6:1.

which it transmits in silence.

32 Besides, there are years to be added in which Samuel was Judge, whose number is not found° in Scripture either.[60]

33 [20] Furthermore, there are the years to be added of the Kingdom of Saul, which I have omitted in the above computation, since how many years he ruled is not sufficiently established from his history. In I Samuel 13:1, it is indeed said that he ruled two years; but not only is that text truncated, but we gather a greater number from the history itself.

34 [21] That the text is truncated, no one can doubt who has even an elementary acquaintance with the Hebrew language.

35 For it begins as follows: **בן שנה שאול במלכו ושתי שנים מלך על ישראל** *Saul had been born*[61] *when he ruled, and he ruled two years over Israel.*

36 Who, I say, does not see that the number of years of Saul's age when he acquired the kingdom has been omitted?

37 [22] Yet I do not believe that anyone can doubt that a greater number is being concluded on the basis of the history itself.

38 For 27:7 of the same book has it that David stayed a year and four months among the Philistines, to whom he had fled on account of Saul. By this computation, therefore, the rest of his reign had to have happened in a space of eight months: I figure no one believes this.

39 Josephus, at least, at the end of his *Antiquities* VII, corrects the text as follows: *Accordingly, Saul ruled eighteen years while Samuel was alive, and another two after he died.*[62]

40 [23] Indeed, this whole history of chapter 13 does not agree in any mode with what has preceded.

41 At the end of chapter 7, it is narrated that the Philistines were so beaten down by the Hebrews that they did not dare approach Israel's borders while Samuel was alive.[63] Yet here it says that the Hebrews (while Samuel was alive) were invaded by the Philistines, by whom they were reduced to such misery and poverty **{134}** that they were deprived of arms with which to defend themselves, and, moreover, of the means for making them.[64]

42 [24] Surely I would be in enough of a sweat if I were to endeavor to reconcile all these histories that are found° in the First Book of Samuel so that they might all seem to have been written down and ordered by one Historian.

43 But I return to my point.

44 Accordingly, the years of Saul's reign are to be added by the above computation.

45 [25] Finally, I have not even enumerated the years of anarchy of the Hebrews,

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[60] I Sam. 3:19-4:1, 7:15-16, 15:35, 28:3.

[61] Or the Latin could be translated, *Saul was...years old° when he ruled,* assuming with Spinoza in 9.1.36 that there is a number missing in the original Hebrew

[62] Josephus, *Antiquities* VI.378. Cf. the editor's note *ad loc.*: Josephus' original Greek has "twenty-two" instead of "two" (as found in the Latin translation that Spinoza quotes).

[63] I Sam. 7:13-14.

[64] I Sam. 13:6-7, 19-22

since they are not established on the basis of Scripture itself.

46 For me, I say, the time is not established when those things happened which are narrated from Judges 17 down to the end of the book.

47 [26] From these things, accordingly, it follows very clearly both that the true computation of years is not established on the basis of the histories themselves, and that the histories themselves do not agree on one and the same computation°, but suppose rather different ones.

48 Yet it is therefore to be confessed that these histories were gathered from different writers, and have been neither ordered nor examined till now.

49 [27] Nor does the discrepancy in the computation of years seem to have been any less in the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

50 For in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, it is found° that Jehoram, son of Ahab, began to rule in the second year of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat (see II Ki. 1:17).

51 Yet in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, Jehoshaphat began to rule in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoram, son of Ahab (see *idem* 8:16).

52 [28] And besides, if someone would like to compare the histories of the Book of Chronicles with the histories of the Books of Kings, he will discover many such discrepancies, which I have no need to recount here, and many fewer authors' comments by which they endeavor to reconcile those histories.

53 For plainly the Rabbis are obsessing.

54 And the commentators whom I have read dream, fantasize, and plainly corrupt the language itself.

55 [29] For example, when it is said in II Chronicles, *Ahaz was forty-two years old° when he ruled*,[65] some fantasize that these years take their beginning from the reign of Omri, and not from the birth of Ahaz.[66] If they could show that this was the intent of the author of the Books of Chronicles, I would have no doubts in affirming that he did not know how to speak.

56 And they fantasize many other things in this mode, of which, if they were true, I would simply say that the ancient Hebrews were plainly ignorant both of their own language and of how to narrate in order; and I would not acknowledge any reason or norm for interpreting Scripture, but would be permitted to fantasize everything at my discretion. **{135}**

57 [30] If someone still deems that I speak too generally and with insufficient foundation here, I ask him to deal with this by showing us in these histories some certain order that the Historians could be imitating impeccably in the Chronologies; and while he is endeavoring to interpret and reconcile the histories, let him then observe the phrases and modes of speaking and of disposing and contextualizing the speeches, and explain them° so rigorously that we too could imitate them in writing in accordance with his explanation.[67] If he is up to it, I will surrender to him at once, and

[65] II Chr. 22:2.

[66] E.g , Rashi on II Chr. 22:2.

[67] "Cf. Annotation 18 " Spinoza's note.

he will be my great Apollo.[68] [31] For I confess that I have still been unable to discover anything like that, although I have long been seeking. Indeed, I add that I am not writing anything here which I have meanwhile not long meditated on; and although I have been imbued with the common opinions about Scripture from childhood, still I ultimately could not help admitting these things.

58 But there is no reason° why I should detain the reader for long about these things and provoke him into a hopeless undertaking; still, there was a need to point to that very undertaking, for me to explain my mind more clearly. [32] Therefore, I go on to the the other things that I have taken up to be noted concerning the fortune of these books.

59 For besides what we have just shown, it ought to be noted that these books were not kept by Posterity with such diligence that no faults crept in. For the more ancient[69] Scribes noticed many doubtful readings, and several truncated passages besides, though not all. Whether the faults are of such note as to inject great pause in the reader, however, I am not disputing now. Still, I believe they are of lesser importance,[70] at least for those who read the Scriptures with a freer judgment; and this I can certainly affirm: I have not noticed any fault or variant reading concerning the moral lessons which could render them obscure or doubtful.

60 [33] Yet many do not grant that any flaw occurred, even in the other books. But they state that God by some special providence kept the whole Bible incorrupt. They say the variant readings are signs of the most profound mysteries; they contend the same about the 28 asterisks that are found° in the middles of paragraphs—indeed, that great secrets are contained in the very crowns of the letters.

61 [34] Surely I do not know whether they say these things out of foolishness and anile devotion, or rather out of arrogance and malice so that they alone might be believed to have God's secrets. This, at least, I do know: I have read nothing of theirs that might smell of a secret, but only childish thoughts.

62 I have also read, and moreover have recognized, some Kabbalistic triflers, **{136}** about whose insanity I could never wonder enough.

63 [35] That faults have crept in as we have said, however, I believe no one of sound judgment can deny who has read that text of Saul (which we have already presented from I Sam. 13:1),[71] and also II Samuel 6:2, namely, *And David arose; and he and all the populace that were with him went from Judah to bring the ark of God from there.*

64 No one cannot see here as well that the place they went to carry the ark from, namely, Kiriat Jearim,[72] is omitted. [36] Nor can we deny that II Samuel 13:37 is confused and truncated: *And Absalom fled and went to Ptolemy, son of Amihud, king of Geshur, and he mourned his son every day; and Absalom fled and went to Geshur and stayed there three years.*[73]

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[68] I.e., oracle. Cf. Virgil, *Bucolics* III.404

[69] Or: earlier.

[70] Lit.: of lighter moment.

[71] See 9.1.33-47.

[72] "Cf Annotation 19." Spinoza's note.

65 And I know that I have previously noted other things in this mode which do not occur to me at present.

66 [37] That the marginal notes that are discovered in passing in the Hebrew Codices were doubtful readings, moreover, no one can doubt either, who pays attention to the fact that some have arisen from the great similarity of Hebrew letters among themselves.

67 Namely, from the similarity that כ *Kaf* has to ב *Bet*, י *Yod* to ו *Vav*, ד *Dalet* to ר *Resh*, etc.

68 For example, where it is written in II Samuel 5:24, בשמעך *and in that* (time) *in which you hear*, there is found° in the margin כשמעך *when you hear*, and in Judges 21:22, והיה כי יבואו אבותם או אחיהם לרוב *And when their fathers or brothers come to us in a multitude* (i.e., often), there is found° in the margin לריב *to quarrel.*

69 [38] And furthermore very many have also arisen in this same mode from the use of letters that they call Quiescent: very often no pronunciation of them is heard, no doubt, and one is taken indiscriminately for another.

70 For example, Leviticus 25:30 is written וקם הבית אשר בעיר אשר לא חומה *And a house that is in a city for which there is no wall will be confirmed,* whereas in the margin is found° אשר לו חומה *for which there is a wall*, etc.

71 [39] Yet although these things are clear enough in themselves, we may reply to the reasons of some Pharisees by which they endeavor to persuade us° that the marginal notes have been juxtaposed or indicated by the Writers of the Sacred Books° themselves to signify some mystery.

72 The first of these, which hardly touches me, they take from their custom in reading the Scriptures. If, they say, these notes have been juxtaposed on account of the variety of readings which posterity could not decide on, why therefore has the usage prevailed of everywhere retaining the marginal sense? Why, they say, have they noted in the margin the sense that they meant to retain? {137} On the contrary, they had to have written the scrolls themselves just as they meant them to be read, and not noted in the margin the sense and reading which they approved of most.

73 [40] A second reason—which in truth seems to carry something to° show[74] for itself—is taken from the nature of the matter itself.

74 Namely, that faults were not intentional, but have crept into the Codices by chance; and what comes about in that way° happens variedly.

75 Yet in the five books,[75] the noun נערה *girl*, with only one passage excepted, is always written defectively, without the letter ה *hey*, contrary to the Grammatical rule, whereas in the margin it is written correctly in accordance with the universal Grammatical rule.

76 Has this happened just from the hand's having erred while writing it down? By what fate could it have come about that the pen always rushed whenever this noun occurred? Furthermore, the Grammarians could have easily and without misgiving supplied and emended this defect on the basis of the rules.

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[73] "Cf. Annotation 20." Spinoza's note.

[74] Lit.: some show.

[75] I.e., of Moses.

77 [41] Therefore, since these readings did not happen by chance and they did not correct flaws so clear, hence they conclude that these things were done on certain counsel by the first Writers, so as to signify something by them.

78 But these things we can easily answer; for the fact that they argue on the basis of a usage that has developed among them does not give me any pause. [42] I do not know what superstition could have swayed them; and perhaps it happened since they regarded either reading as equally good or tolerable; and therefore, lest either of them be neglected, they meant the one to be written and the other to be read.

79 They were afraid to determine their judgment on such a matter lest, being uncertain, they chose the false reading° for the true one; and therefore they meant to privilege neither one nor the other—which they absolutely would have done if they had bidden the writing or reading of only one, especially since the marginal notes are not written in the Sacred scrolls. [43] Or perhaps it has come about since they wanted some things, though written down correctly, to be read otherwise anyway—just as they had noted in the margin.

80 And therefore they instituted a universal rule[76] that the Bible be read in accordance with the marginal notes.

81 [44] What cause moved the Scribes to note some readings in the margin, I will now say; for not all marginal notes are doubtful readings, but they also noted readings that had been dropped from usage.

82 Namely, obsolete words, and those that the approved morals[77] of the time did not permit to be read at a public assembly.

83 [45] For the ancient[78] Writers were innocent of malice, but indicated matters by their proper names with no courteous ambiguities.

84 Yet after malice and luxury ruled, **{138}** those things that were said without obscenity by the ancients began to be considered obscenities.

85 There was no need to change Scripture because of this, however; and yet, to overcome the weakness of the plebs, they introduced more respectable names for coitus and excrement to be read in public[79]—just as they had noted in the margin.

86 [46] Finally, whatever it was why it had become the usage for them to read and interpret the Scriptures in accordance with the marginal readings, at least it was not that the true interpretation has to be in acordance with them.

87 For besides the fact that in the Talmud the Rabbis themselves often depart from the Masoretes and have other readings of which they approve, as I will soon show,[80] some are moreover found in the margin which seem less approved in accordance with the usage of the language.

88 [47] For example, in II Samuel 14:22 is written: **אשר עשה המלך את דבר עבדו** *since the King did*[81] *in accordance with the sentiment*[81] *of his servant*: this construction

[76] Lit.: universally

[77] Or: mores.

[78] Or earlier.

[79] Lit.. that names for coitus and excrements be read more respectably in public.

[80] See 9.1.102, 109

[81] Lit.: effected.

is plainly regular, and agrees with that of verse 15 of the same chapter; yet what is found° in the margin (**עבדך** *your servant*) does not agree with the person of the verb.

89 [48] So too, in the last verse of chapter 16 of the same Book is written: **כאשר ישאל בדבר האלהים** *when one° consults God's word* (i.e., it is consulted), where **איש** *someone* is added in the margin for the subject of the verb.

90 This does not seem to have been done accurately enough; for the common usage of this language is that impersonal verbs usurp the third person singular active verb, as is very well recognized by Grammarians.

91 And many notes are discovered in this mode which cannot be privileged over the written reading in any mode.

92 [49] What touches on the Pharisees' second reason, moreover, is also easily answered on the basis of what has just been said: namely, that besides the doubtful readings, the Scribes noted obsolete words as well. For there is no doubt that in the Hebrew language, as in others, later usage made many words obsolete and antiquated; and they were found in the Bible by the last Scribes, who, as we have said,[83] noted them all so that they would be read before the populace in accordance with the usage then acceptable.

93 [50] Because of this, therefore, the noun **נער** *na'ar*[84] is found noted everywhere, since earlier[84] it was of common gender and signified the same thing as *juvenis* among Latin-speakers.

94 So too, the Hebrews' metropolis was usually called **ירושלם** *Yerushalem*, and not **ירושלים** *Yerushlaim*: I feel the same about the pronoun **הוא** *ipse* and *ipsa*[86]—that more recent Scribes changed **ו** *vav* into **י** *yod* (which is a frequent change in the Hebrew language) when they meant to signify the feminine gender. **{139}** Yet the ancients did not usually distinguish the feminine of this pronoun from the masculine except by vowels.

95 [51] So, too, the anomalies of some words were of one sort among prior writers°, of another sort among later ones;[87] and, finally, the ancients used the paragogic letters **האמנתיו** with the elegance specific to their time.

96 I could illustrate all this here by many examples, but I do not want to detain the reader with a tedious reading.

97 [52] Yet if someone will ask how I recognize these things, I answer: because they are often found among the most ancient Writers—namely, in the Bible—and yet later ones did not want them imitated, which is the one cause whereby in other languages, even though they are now dead, words are recognized as obsolete.

98 [53] But perhaps someone will yet insist, since I have stated that the greatest part of these notes are doubtful readings: Why are more than two readings never found for one passage? Why not sometimes three or more?

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[82] Elsewhere: tenet.

[83] See 9.1 81-85.

[84] Hebrew: a youth.

[85] Or: in ancient times°.

[86] Lit.: *he* and *she*. Cf. Spinoza, *Hebrew Grammar*, 61f.

[87] Elsewhere: posterity.

99 Furthermore, some readings in Sacred° Writ which are correctly noted in the margin conflict so manifestly with the Grammar, that it is hardly to be believed that the scribes could have hesitated and doubted which reading was true.

100 [54] But these things are easily answered; and to the first, at any rate, I say that there were more readings than those we find noted in our codices.

101 For in the Talmud many readings are noted which have been neglected by the Masoretes; and they depart from them so openly in many passages, that the superstitious editor of the Bomberg Bible was at last compelled to confess, in his preface, that he did not know how to reconcile them, and says: ולא ידענא לתרוצי אלא כדתריצנא לעיל דארחיה דגמרא לפלוגי על המסורת *We do not know what to reply here except what we have replied above*, namely, *that the custom of the Talmud is to contradict the Masoretes.*[88]

102 Therefore, we cannot with sufficient foundation state that there have never been more than two readings for one passage.

103 [55] Still, I easily grant, indeed I believe, that more than two readings have never been found for one passage, and this for two reasons. Namely, first, since the cause from which we have shown the variety of these readings to have arisen cannot allow for more than two. For we have shown them to have arisen mainly from the similarity of some letters.

104 [56] Therefore, doubt will almost always return ultimately to this: viz., which of two letters should be written, ב *Bet* or כ *Kaf*, י *Yod* or ו *Vav*, ד *Dalet* or ר *Resh*, etc., whose use is very frequent. And therefore it could often {140} happen that either of the senses would appear tolerable.

105 Furthermore, whether a syllable is long or short whose quantity is determined by those letters we call Quiescent.

106 Add to these that not all the notes are doubtful readings. For we have said[89] that many were juxtaposed for the sake of respectability and also to explain obsolete and antiquated words.

107 [57] Second, the reason why I persuade myself that no more than two readings are found for one passage is that I believe that the Scribes found very few manuscripts, perhaps not more than two or three.

108 In the tractate סופרים *Scribes*, chapter 6,[90] mention is made of only three, which they fantasize were discovered at the time of Ezra, since they passed it off that these notes were juxtaposed by Ezra himself.

109 [58] Whatever it may be, if they had three, we can easily conceive that two always agreed on the same passage; otherwise, indeed, surely anyone could have wondered if three different readings of one and the same passage were found in only three manuscripts.

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[88] "The editor of the rabbinic Bible published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1525-26 is R. Jacob ben Hayyim. It contains the Masoretic text, the Aramean targum, and the principal commentators, notably Ibn Ezra and Rashi. Spinoza possesses in his library not the Bomberg Bible itself, but that of Buxtorf, which reproduces the text. . ." Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 749, n. 68.

[89] See 9.1.84-85.

[90] Babylonian Talmud, *Soferim* 37b (trans. A. Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud: Massektoth Ketannoth* [2 vols.; London: Soncino, 1965], 239).

110 By what fate it happened that there was such a poverty of manuscripts after Ezra, moreover, one who only reads either I Maccabees 1[91] or Josephus' *Antiquities* XII.5[92] will cease wondering.

111 Indeed, it seems like a prodigy that they could retain those few after so much and such long-lasting persecution. I am of the opinion that no one doubts this who has read that history[93] with a little attention.

112 [59] Accordingly, we see the causes of why more than two readings do not occur anywhere.

113 On that account, from the fact that no more than two are given anywhere, we are far from being able to conclude that, in the passages noted, the Bible was intentionally written erroneously to signify some mysteries.

114 [60] As for what pertains to the second thing[94]—that some passages° are found so erroneously written that the Scribes° could not doubt in any mode that they conflicted with the written usage of any time, and so they absolutely had to correct them, not note them in the margin—it hardly touches me; for I am not bound to know what religious motive they had for not doing it.[95]

115 [61] And perhaps they did it out of a straightforwardness of spirit, wanting to hand the Bible down to posterity as it was discovered by them in the few originals, and to note the discrepancies of the originals not as doubtful readings but as variant ones. I have called them doubtful only since I really find almost all of them to be such, so that I hardly know which is to be approved in preference to others.

116 [62] Finally, besides these doubtful readings, the Scribes moreover noted many truncated passages (by interposing an empty **{141}** space in the middles of paragraphs), whose number the Masoretes hand down. They enumerate twenty-eight passages where an empty space is interposed in the middle of a paragraph: I do not know whether they believe that some mystery lies in the number as well.

117 The Pharisees observe a certain quantity of space religiously, however.

118 [63] An example of these (if I may bring up one) is found° in Genesis 4:8, which is written as follows: *And Cain said to his brother Abe. . . And it happened when they were in the field that Cain, etc.*, where a space is left empty where we were expecting to know what it was that Cain had said to his° brother.

119 And twenty-eight are found left in this mode by the Scribes (besides those things we have already noted).

120 Yet many of these would not appear truncated if the space had not been interposed.

121 But enough of these things.

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91 I Macc. 1:56.

92 See *Antiquities* XII.256.

93 Or: story.

94 See 9 1 73-77.

95 Lit.: what religion moved them not to do it.

# CHAPTER 10

## The Remaining Books of the Old Testament are examined in the same mode as the previous ones

¶1 I go over to the remaining books of the Old Testament.

2 Yet concerning the two books° of Chronicles, I have nothing to note that is certain and worth the effort, except that it was written some time after Ezra and perhaps after Judah Maccabee restored the temple.[1]

3 For in I, 9, the Historian narrates *which families first* (at the time of Ezra) *inhabited Jerusalem.*[2] And furthermore, at verse 17, he indicates the *Gatekeepers*, two of whom are also narrated in Nehemiah 11:19.

4 This shows that these books were written some time after the rebuilding of the city.[3]

5 [2] Otherwise, about their true Writer, and their authority, utility and teaching, nothing is established for me.

6 Indeed, I cannot wonder enough why it was accepted among the Sacred Books° by those who eliminated the book of Wisdom, Tobit, and the rest that are called apocryphal, from the canon of Sacred ones. Still, the intent is not to disparage their authority, but since they have been accepted by everyone, I too leave them just as they are.

7 [3] The Psalms were also gathered and partitioned into five books in the second temple. For according to[4] Philo Judaeus,[5] Psalm 88 was edited while King Jehoiakin was being detained in prison in Babylonia, and {142} Psalm 89 when the same King acquired his freedom. Nor do I believe that Philo would ever have said this, unless either it was the received opinion of his time, or he accepted it from others worthy of faith.

8 [4] The Proverbs of Solomon, I believe, were gathered at the same time as well, or

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1 "Cf. Annotation 21 " Spinoza's note.

2 I Chr. 9.3ff.

3 I e., of Jerusalem.

4 Elsewhere: on the basis of.

5 Pseudo-Philo, *Breviarium de Temporibus*. The book, attributed to Philo, is paraphrased in Hebrew by Azariah dei Rossi (1513/4-78) in his *Sefer Meor Einayim* (1573-75), pt .3, ch. 32 (ed. D. Kassel [3 vols.; Jerusalem: Mekor, 1969/70], III, 281-84); for the passage in question, see 283; trans. J. Weinberg as Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001], 415-19; see 416.

at least at the time of King Josiah, and this because in the last verse of chapter 24[6] it is said, *These are also the Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, copied out.*

9 [5] Yet here I cannot be silent about the audacity of the Rabbis, who wanted to exclude this book with Ecclesiastes from the canon of Sacred ones and keep it with the rest that we now lack.[7]

10 This they absolutely would have done, if they had not found passages where the law of Moses is commended.

11 Surely it is to be lamented that matters that are sacred and best would depend on their choice.

12 Still, I am grateful to them that they wanted to communicate these books to us as well; but I cannot help doubting whether they handed them down in good faith: I do not want to put this to a severe examination here.

13 [6] I therefore go on to the books of the Prophets.

14 When I pay attention to these, I see that the Prophecies that are contained in these books have been gathered from other books and have not always been written down in the same order in which they were spoken or written by the Prophets themselves; and not all of them are contained in these books either, but only those that could be discovered here and there. Therefore, these books are only fragments of the Prophets.

15 [7] For Isaiah began to prophesy during the reign of Uzziah, as the writer himself attests in the first verse.

16 Yet not only did he prophesy at that time, but moreover he wrote down all the things accomplished by that King (see II Chr. 26:22): this book we now lack.

17 What we do have, we have shown to have been written down from the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel.[8]

18 [8] Add to these things that the Rabbis[9] state that this Prophet also prophesied during the reign of Manasseh, by whom he was ultimately slain; and although they seem to be narrating a fable, still they seem to have believed that not all his Prophecies were extant.

19 [9] Furthermore, the Prophecies of Jeremiah which are narrated historically are excerpted and gathered from various Chronologies.

20 For besides the fact that they are accumulated confusedly, taking no account of the times, the same history[10] is moreover repeated in different modes.

21 For chapter 21 sets forth the cause of Jeremiah's arrest, the fact that he predicted the city's[11] sacking when Zedekiah consulted him; and in chapter 22 this interrupted history goes over to narrating his declamation {143} against Jehoiakin, who ruled before Zedekiah, and the fact that he predicted the King's captivity; and then

[6] Prov 25:1.

[7] Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 13b, 30b (trans. Epstein, 55, 135). See also 10 1.57, 59.

[8] See 9.1.6

[9] E.g , Rashı on Is. 1:1

[10] Or. story. Likewise in 10.1.21.

[11] I.e., Jerusalem's.

chapter 25 describes the things that were revealed to the Prophet before these, in the fourth year of Jehoiakin.

22 Next, with no order of the times being kept, it goes on to accumulate Prophecies of the first year of the same King, [10] and so on, until it returns in chapter 38 to what it began to narrate in chapter 21 (as if these intervening° 15 chapters were said parenthetically).

23 For the link by which that chapter[12] begins is being referred to in its verses 8-10. Yet it next describes Jeremiah's final arrest quite otherwise, and hands down quite another cause of his stay in prison than what is narrated in chapter 37[13]—so that you would clearly see that all these things are gathered from different Historians and cannot be excused for any other reason.

24 [11] Yet the remaining Prophecies—which are contained in the remaining chapters, where Jeremiah speaks in the first person—seem to have been written down from the scroll that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's own dictation.[14] For (as is established from 36:2) it only contained the things that were revealed to this Prophet from the time of Josiah down to the fourth year of Jehoiakin: this book begins from that time as well.

25 Furthermore, those contained° from 45:2 to 51:59 seem to have been written down in the same scroll.

26 [12] That the Book of Ezekiel too is only a fragment, its first verses indicate very clearly. For who does not see that the link by which the book begins is related to other things already said and connects the things to be said with them? Yet not only the link, but also the whole context of the speech supposes other writings. [13] For the thirtieth year, from which this book begins,[15] shows that the Prophet is going on with his narrating, not beginning it; the Writer himself also notes this parenthetically at verse three,[16] as follows: *God's word had often come to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, a priest in the land of the Chaldeans, etc.*, as if to say that the words of Ezekiel which had been written down thus far were related to other things that had been revealed to him before this thirtieth year.

27 Furthermore, Josephus, in *Antiquities* X.7,[17] narrates that Ezekiel had predicted that Zedekiah would not see Babylonia; this is not read in our book as we have it, but the opposite: chapter 17[18] reads° that he would be led captive to Babylonia.[19]

28 [14] About Hosea, we cannot say for certain that he wrote more than what is contained in the book said to be his.

29 Yet I wonder that we do not have more of someone who, on the attestation of

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12 I.e., Jer. 38.

13 Jer. 37:11-21.

14 Jer. 45:1.

15 Ezek. 1:1

16 Ezek. 1:3.

17 *Antiquities* X.106-107.

18 Ezek. 17:20.

19 "Cf Annotation 22." Spinoza's note

the Writer, prophesied for more than {144} eighty-four years.[20]

30 [15] This, at least, we know in general: the Writers of these books did not gather all the prophecies, either of all the Prophets or of those whom we have. For of those Prophets who prophesied during the reign of Manasseh and of whom mention is made in general in II Chronicles 33:10, 18-19, we plainly have no prophecies. Nor do we have all even of these twelve Prophets.

31 For of Jonah, only the Prophecies about the Ninevites are written down,[21] while yet he also prophesied to the Israelites: on this matter, see II Kings 14:25.

¶2 [16] About the Book of Job and about Job himself, there has been much controversy among Writers.

2 Some deem that Moses wrote it and that the whole history[22] is only a parable. Some Rabbis in the Talmud deal with this, whom Maimonides also favors in his book *Guide of the Perplexed.*[23]

3 Others have believed it to be a true history, of whom there are some who have deemed that this Job lived at the time of Jacob and married his daughter Dinah.

4 [17] Yet Ibn Ezra, as we have already said above,[24] affirms in his commentaries on this book that it was translated from another language into Hebrew. I would want him to have shown this to us more plainly; for we would be able to conclude from it that the gentiles too had sacred books.

5 Accordingly, I leave the matter in doubt; yet I conjecture this: Job was some man, a gentile, and of the most steadfast spirit, for whom matters first went favorably, then very adversely, and at last very happily.

6 For Ezekiel 14:14 names him among others. [18] And I believe that Job's varying fortune and steadfastness of spirit gave occasion for many to dispute about God's providence, or at least for the author of this book to compose a Dialogue. For the things contained in it, as well as its style, seem to be of a man not suffering miserably among the ashes, but meditating at leisure in a library. And here I would believe, with Ibn Ezra, that this book was translated from another language, since it seems to affect the poetry of the Gentiles. For the Father of the Gods twice convokes a council; and Momus, who is here called Satan, criticizes what God says with the greatest freedom, etc.[25] But these things are mere conjectures and are not firm enough.

7 [19] I go over to the Book of Daniel. This without a doubt, on the basis of chapter 8, contains the writings of Daniel himself.[26]

8 Where the first seven chapters were from, however, I do not know.

9 We can suspect that they were from the Chronologies of the Chaldeans, since {145} except for the first chapter they are written in Chaldean.

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20 Hos 1:1.

21 Jon. 3:3.

22 Or: story. Likewise in 10.2 3.

23 *Guide of the Perplexed* III 22-23 Spinoza transliterates the Hebrew title of Maimonides' book

24 See 7.11.4.

25 Job 1:6-12, 2:1-6; cf. *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s v. "Momus."

26 Cf. Dan. 8:1, 9:1, 20-22, 10:2-5, etc.

10 [20] If this were to be clearly established, it would be very enlightening attestation for evincing that Scripture is only sacred to the extent that through it we understand the matters signified in it, and not to the extent that we understood the words or language and speeches by which the matters are signified. And besides, the books that teach and narrate the best things, in whatever language and by whatever nation they were ultimately written, are equally sacred.

11 Still, we can at least note this: these chapters were written in Chaldean, and nevertheless they are equally as sacred as the rest of the Bible.

12 [21] To this Book of Daniel, moreover, is annexed the first chapter of Ezra, so that it is easily recognized that it is the same Writer who goes on to narrate in succession the affairs of the Jews from their first captivity.

13 [22] Nor do I doubt that the Book of Esther is annexed to it.

14 For the link by which this book begins cannot be related to any other book. Nor is it to be believed that it is the same one that Mordecai wrote.

15 For in 9:20-22, someone else narrates about Mordecai himself that he wrote Epistles, and what they contained. Furthermore, in 9:31, that Queen Esther firmed up matters pertaining to the Feast of Lots (Purim) by an edict and that it was written in a book,[27] that is (as is the overtone in Hebrew), in a book recognized by everyone at that time (when these things were written). And Ibn Ezra confesses,[28] and everyone is bound to confess, that this book has perished along with others.

16 Finally, the Historian relates the other affairs of Mordecai to the Chronicles of the Kings of Persia.[29]

17 [23] Therefore, it is not to be doubted that this book was also written by the same Historian who narrated the affairs of Daniel and Ezra—and moreover the book of Nehemiah[30] as well, since it is said to be II Ezra.

18 We therefore affirm that these four books, namely, Daniel, Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah, were written by one and the same Historian. Who he was, however, I am not able to suspect.

19 [24] That we might know where he, whoever he was, received his acquaintance with these histories,[31] and perhaps even wrote down the greatest part of them, it is to be noted that the prefects, or princes of the Jews in the second temple, like their Kings in the first temple, had scribes or historians who successively wrote annals, or a Chronology of them. For Chronologies of the Kings, or annals, are cited in passing in the Books of Kings; and those of the Princes and the priests of the second temple are cited first in Nehemiah {146} 12:23, then in I Maccabees 16:24.

20 [25] And without a doubt, this is the book of which we have just spoken where Esther's edict and the Epistles of Mordecai were written, and which we have said,[32]

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[27] Est 9.32.

[28] Ibn Ezra on Est. 9:32.

[29] Est. 10 2

[30] "Cf Annotation 23." Spinoza's note.

[31] Or: stories.

[32] See 10.2.15.

with Ibn Ezra, has perished (see Est. 9:31).

21 Everything that is contained in this book, therefore, has been taken or written down from that book. For no one else is cited by its Writer, and we know of no one else in public authority.

22 [26] That these books were written neither by Ezra nor by Nehemiah, moreover, is plain from the fact that, in Nehemiah 12:10-11, a genealogy of the high pontiff extends from Jeshua down to Jaddua—the sixth pontiff, who went to meet Alexander the Great when the Persian Empire was almost subjugated (see Josephus, *Antiquities* XI.8),[33] or, as Philo Judaeus says in his book on the times,[34] the sixth and last pontiff under the Persians.

23 [27] Indeed, in this same chapter of Nehemiah, verse 22, this same thing is clearly indicated.

24 *The Levites*, says the Historian, *at the time of Eliashav, Joiada, Jonathan, and Jaddua were written of over*[35] *the reign of Darius the Persian*, namely, in the Chronologies. And I believe that no one figures Ezra[36] or Nehemiah was so old as to have outlived the fourteen Kings of the Persians. For Cyrus was the first of all to grant the Jews permission to rebuild the temple; and from that time down to Darius, the fourteenth and last King of the Persians, over 230 years are enumerated.

25 [28] Therefore, I do not doubt that these books were written after Judah Maccabee restored the Temple worship—since false books of Daniel, Ezra, and Esther were being given out at that time by some malevolent persons who were, without a doubt, of the sect of the Sadducees. For the Pharisees never accepted those books, that I know of.

26 And although in this book, which is said to be IV Ezra, some fables are found which we also read in the Talmud, still they are not therefore to be attributed to the Pharisees; for, if you take away the stupidest, there is none of them who would not believe that those fables were thrown in by some trifler. I even believe some Sadducees° did this to expose traditions of the Pharisees'° which were to be laughed at by all.

27 [29] Or perhaps the fables were written down and edited at that time because they showed the populace that Daniel's Prophecies were fulfilled, and confirmed them in the religion for this reason, {147} lest during so many calamities they despair of better times and of a future salvation.

28 [30] Be that as it may, even though these books are so recent and new, still many faults have crept into them—from the haste, if I am not mistaken, of those who wrote them down.

29 For in these, as in the others, many marginal notes are also found—which we have dealt with in the preceding Chapter[37]—and, besides, some passages as well which cannot be excused for any other reason, as I will now show. But first, concerning their

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[33] *Antiquities* XI.325-39.

[34] Pseudo-Philo, *loc. cit.,* p. 284. See note to 10.1.7.

[35] "N B. Unless it signifies *beyond*, it was an error of the transcriber, who wrote על, *above*, for עד, *until*." Spinoza's note.

[36] "Cf. Annotation 24." Spinoza's note

[37] See 9.1.65-115.

marginal readings, I want it noted that, if the Pharisees are to be granted that the readings are as ancient as the Writers themselves of these books, then it is necessarily to be said that the Writers themselves, if perhaps there were many, noted them because they discovered that the very Chronologies from which they wrote them down were not written accurately enough. And although some faults were clear, still they did not dare to emend the writings of those who were ancient and greater.

30 Nor is there need for me now to deal with these things here again at more length.

31 [31] I therefore go over to indicating those faults that are not noted in the margin.

32 Yet, first, I do not know how many I should say crept into Ezra 2. For in verse 64, the total sum of all who are enumerated distributively in the whole chapter is handed down, and these together are said to have been 42,360. And still, if you add the partial sums, you will not discover more than 29,818.

33 Therefore, the error here is either in the total, or in the partial sums.

34 Yet it is to be believed that the total is handed down correctly, it seems, since without a doubt each kept it in his memory as a memorable matter, though the fact is not the same for the partial sums.

35 And so, if an error were to slip into the total sum, it would appear right away to each and be easily corrected.

36 [32] Yet this is plainly confirmed from the fact that in Nehemiah 7—where this chapter of Ezra (which is called the Epistle of the Genealogy) is written down,[38] just as it is expressly said in verse 5 of the same chapter of Nehemiah—the total sum plainly agrees with that of the book of Ezra, whereas the partial ones rather disagree. For you will find some greater and some smaller than in Ezra, and all together make up 31,089.

37 Therefore, there is no doubt that, in the partial sums alone, as many faults have crept into the book of Ezra as into that of Nehemiah.

38 [33] Every one of the commentators who endeavors to reconcile these evident contradictions, moreover, fantasizes in proportion to the strength of his intellect; and meanwhile—while they adore the letters and words of Scripture—they do nothing else, as we have already admonished above,[39] but expose the Writers of the Bible **{148}** to contempt, so that they seem to know neither how to speak nor how to order the things to be said. Indeed, they do nothing else but, plainly, to obscure the transparency of Scripture. For if interpreting Scripture in their mode were permitted everywhere, surely there would be no speech whose true sense we could not doubt.

39 [34] But there is no reason° for me to be detained for long concerning these things. For I persuade myself that, if some Historian wanted to imitate everything they devoutly grant to Writers of the Bible, they would laugh at him in many modes.[40]

40 And if they deem that one who says that Scripture anywhere is faulty is

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[38] Ezra 2, Neh. 7:6-73.

[39] See 9.1.51-57. Cf. A.13 (to 9.1.13).

[40] Lit.: modes.

blasphemous, I ask: By what name should I then call those who attach whatever they like to Scripture? Who is prostituting the Sacred Historians so that they are believed to stammer and confuse everything? Who, furthermore, is denying that the senses of Scripture are transparent and very evident? [35] For what can be clearer in Scripture than that Ezra with his companions, in the Epistle of the Genealogy written down in chapter 2 of the book that is said to be his, comprehended in the parts the number of all those who made for Jerusalem, since in the parts he handed down the number not only of those who could indicate their Genealogy, but also of those who could not.

41 What, I say, is clearer from Nehemiah 7:5 than that Nehemiah simply wrote down this same Epistle?

42 [36] Those who explain these things otherwise, therefore, do nothing else but deny the true sense of Scripture and, consequently, Scripture itself. That they deem it is pious to accommodate one set of passages of Scripture to others is surely a ridiculous piety, which would accommodate clear passages to obscure ones, and correct ones to faulty ones, and would corrupt the sound ones by the rotten ones.

43 Still, far be it from me to call those who have no spirit for cursing blasphemers. For to err is indeed human.

44 But I return to the point.

45 [37] Besides the faults that are to be granted in the sums of the Epistle of the Genealogy in both Ezra and Nehemiah, many are also noted in the very names of the families; many, moreover, in the Genealogies themselves, in the histories,[41] and, I am afraid, in the Prophecies themselves as well.

46 For surely Jeremiah's Prophecy about Jeconiah in chapter 22 does not seem to agree in any mode with his history (see the end of II Ki.[42] and Jer.[43] and I Chr. 3:17-19), and especially the words of the last verse of that chapter. [38] Nor do I see for what reason he could say of Zedekiah, whose eyes were being gouged out at the same time that he saw the slaying of his sons, {149} *You will die peacefully, etc.* (see Jer. 34:5).

47 If the Prophecies are to be interpreted from the outcome, it would seem that these names are to be changed, and Jeconiah is to be taken for Zedekiah, and Zedekiah for Jeconiah. But this is an extreme paradox, and so I prefer to leave the matter as impenetrable,[44] especially since, if there is some error here, it is to be attributed to the Historian, not to a flaw in the manuscripts.

48 [39] As for the others I have mentioned, I do not deem that I should note them here, since I could not do it effectively[45] without the reader's great tedium—especially since they have already been noted by others.

49 [40] For Rashi,[46] in view of the very manifest contradictions that he observed in

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[41] Or: stories. Likewise in 10.2.46.

[42] II Ki. 25:27-30.

[43] Jer. 52:31-34.

[44] Lit.: unperceivable. See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[45] Lit : effect it

[46] Lit.: Rabbi Shlomo. The reference is to the preëminent rabbinic biblical and talmudic commentator, Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitschak (1040-1105), known in rabbinic tradition by his acronym, רש״י.

the genealogies referred to, was compelled to break out into these words (see his commentary on I Chr. 8): namely, *the fact that Ezra* (whom he deems to have written Chronicles) *called the children of Benjamin by other names and derived his genealogy otherwise than we have it in the Book of Genesis, and furthermore that he indicates the greatest part of the cities of the Levites otherwise than Joshua does, emerges from the fact that he discovered discrepancies in the originals.*[47] And, a little further on, *the fact that the Genealogy of Gibeon and others is written down twice and variedly occurs since Ezra discovered many and varying Epistles of each Genealogy and, in writing them down, followed the majority of the manuscripts; and, when the number of discrepant genealogies was equal, he then wrote down the manuscript versions° of both.*[48] [41] Yet, in this mode, he absolutely grants that these books had been written down from originals that were not sufficiently correct and not sufficiently certain.

50 Indeed, very often the commentators themselves, being eager to reconcile passages, do nothing more than indicate the causes of errors. Finally, I figure no one of sound judgment believes that the Sacred Historians wanted to write advisedly so as to seem to contradict themselves in passing.

51 [42] Yet perhaps someone would say that, by this rationale, I am plainly overturning Scripture; for by this rationale everyone can suspect it to be faulty everywhere. But on the contrary, I have shown by this rationale that I have consulted Scripture, so that its clear and pure passages are not accommodated to, and corrupted by, its faulty ones. Nor, just because some passages are corrupted, is it permitted to suspect the same about them all. For no book has ever been found without faults.

52 Has anyone, I ask, ever suspected because of this that books are faulty everywhere? Surely no one, especially when the speech is transparent and the mind of the author is clearly perceived.

53 [43] With these things, I have discharged what I had wanted to note concerning the history of the Books of the Old Testament. **{150}**

54 From these things, we easily gather that there was no canon of Sacred Books before the time of the Maccabees;[49] but those we now have were selected in preference to many others by the Pharisees of the second temple, who also instituted the formulas for praying; and they were accepted solely on the basis of their decree.

55 [44] Accordingly, those who want to demonstrate the authority[50] of Sacred Scripture are bound to show the authority of each book; and it is not enough to prove the divinity of one for concluding it of them all. Otherwise it is to be stated that the council of Pharisees could not have erred in this choice of books, which no one will ever demonstrate.

56 [45] The reason that compels me to state that the Pharisees alone chose the books of the Old Testament and put them in the canon of the Holy ones, moreover, is that in the last chapter of the Book of Daniel, verse 2,[51] is predicted the resurrection of

[47] Rashi on I Chr. 8·1.

[48] Rashi on I Chr 8:29.

[49] "Cf. Annotation 25." Spinoza's note.

[50] Or: authorship Likewise later in 10.2.55 and in 10.2.61.

[51] I.e., Dan 12.13

the dead, which the Sadducees denied. Furthermore, the Pharisees themselves clearly indicate this in the Talmud.

57 Namely, it says in *Tractate Shabbat*, chapter 2, folio 30, page 2,[52] **אמר רבי יהודה משמיה דרב בקשו חכמים לגנוז ספר קהלת מפני שדבריו סותרין דברי תותה ומפני מה לא גנזוהו מפני שתחילתו דברי תורה וסופו דברי תורה** *Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: The experts sought to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, since its words conflicted with the words of the law* (n.b., with the book of the law of Moses). *Why, moreover, did they not hide it? Since it begins in accordance with the law and ends in accordance with the law.*

58 [46] And a little later on,[53] **ואף ספר משלי בקשו לגנוז** *And they also sought to hide the Book of Proverbs, etc.*

59 And, finally, in the same *Tractate*, chapter 1, folio 13, page 2:[54] **ברם זכור אותו האיש לטוב נחניה בן חזקיה שמו שאלמלא הוא נגנז ספר יחזקאל שהיו דבריו סותרין דברי תורה** *Indeed, proclaim that man for the sake of his goodness*[55] *whose name is Nehuniah, son of Hezekiah. For had it not been for him, the Book of Ezekiel would have been hidden, since its words conflicted with the words of the law, etc.*

60 [47] From these things, it very clearly follows that the experts in the law summoned a council on what sort of books were to be accepted as sacred and what sort were to be excluded.

61 Accordingly, whoever wants to be certain of the authority of them all, let him take counsel once more and investigate the reason for each.

62 [48] Now, however, would be the time to examine in the same mode the books of the New Testament as well.

63 But since I hear it has been done by Men who are very expert both in the sciences and especially in languages, and also since I do not have so exact a knowledge of the Greek language as to dare to undertake this province, and, finally, since we are deprived of the manuscripts of the books that have been written in the Hebrew language, {151} therefore I prefer to bypass this business.

64 Still, I deem that I should note the things that most contribute to my design—about these, see° in the following.

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[52] Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 30b (trans. Epstein, 135).

[53] *Ibid.* (trans Epstein,137).

[54] *Ibid.*, 13b (trans. Epstein, 55).

[55] Elsewhere: gentleness

# CHAPTER 11

## It is inquired whether the Apostles wrote their Epistles as Apostles and Prophets or, in truth, as Teachers. Furthermore, the duty of the Apostles is shown

¶1 No one who reads the New Testament can doubt that the Apostles were Prophets.
2 But since the Prophets did not always speak on the basis of revelation but on the contrary did so quite rarely, as we have shown at the end of Chapter 1,[1] we can doubt whether the Apostles wrote the Epistles as Prophets, on the basis of revelation and an express command, as did Moses, Jeremiah, and the others, or, in truth, as private men or teachers—especially since in I Corinthians 14:6 Paul indicates two kinds of preaching, the one on the basis of revelation, the other on the basis of knowledge; and therefore, I say, it is to be doubted whether in the Epistles they prophesy or, in truth, teach.
3 [2] But if we want to pay attention to their style, we will discover that it is very alien to the style of the Prophets.
4 For the Prophets were very used to attesting everywhere that they spoke on the basis of God's edict—namely, *Thus says God*, *Says the God of hosts*, *An edict of God*, *etc.*—and this seems to have taken place not only in the Prophets' public assemblies but also in Epistles that contained revelations, as is plain from the one Elijah wrote to Jehoram (see II Chr. 21:12), which even begins **כה אמר יהוה** *Thus says God.*
5 [3] Yet in the Epistles of the Apostles we read no such thing; but on the contrary, in I Corinthians 7:40 Paul speaks in accordance with his own tenet.
6 Indeed, a spirit of ambivalence[2] and perplexed modes of speaking occur in very many passages, such as *Therefore we adjudge*[3] (Rom. 3:28), and *For I adjudge* (8:18), and more in this mode.
7 [4] Besides these, other modes of speaking are discovered which are plainly remote from Prophetic authority.[4]
8 Namely, *This, however, I say, as being feeble, and not on the basis of a command* (see I Cor. 7:6); *I give counsel as a man who,*[5] *by God's grace, is faithful* **{152}** (see *idem* 7:25); and thus many others. And it is to be noted that when he says

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[1] See 1.24.5.
[2] Lit.: ambiguous spirits.
[3] "Cf. Annotation 26." Spinoza's note.
[4] Or: authorship. Likewise at 11.1.20.
[5] Reading *qui* for *quia*.

in the aforementioned chapter that he has or does not have a precept or command of God, he does not understand a precept or command revealed to him by God, but only the lessons of Christ which he taught his disciples on the mountain.[6]

9 Besides, if we also pay attention to the mode in which the Apostles hand down the Gospel teaching in these Epistles, we will see that it also departs somewhat from the mode of the Prophets.

10 For the Apostles reason everywhere, so that they are not seen to prophesy, but to dispute.

11 On the contrary, prophecies in truth contain mere dogmas and decrees only, since God is introduced in them as if he were a speaker who does not reason, but decrees on the basis of the absolute imperium of his own nature, and also since the authority of the Prophets does not allow for reasoning. For whoever wants to confirm his dogmas by reason, by the same token submits them to each's judgment.

12 Paul seems to have done this as well, since he reasons—saying, in I Corinthians 10:15, *I speak as to the wise; you yourselves judge what I say.*

13 And finally, the Prophets did not perceive revealed matters by virtue of the natural light, that is, by reasoning, as we have shown in Chapter 1.[7]

14 [5] And although some things in the five books[8] also seem to be concluded by inference, still, if anyone pays attention to them, he will see that they cannot in any mode be taken as peremptory arguments.

15 For example, Moses said to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 31:27, *If you have been rebellious against God while I have been living among you, you will be much more so after I am dead.*

16 In no mode is it to be understood that Moses wants to convince the Israelites by reason that after his death they will turn away from the true worship of God. For the argument would be false, as could even be shown from Scripture itself. For the Israelites steadfastly persevered while Joshua and the Elders were alive,[9] and also afterward while Samuel, David, Solomon *et al.* were alive.[10]

17 [6] Therefore, those words of Moses were only a moral speech by which he predicted—rhetorically and insofar as he was able to imagine it more vividly—the future apostasy of the populace. The reason why I do not say that Moses said these things on his own so as to make his prediction plausible to the populace and not by revelation as a Prophet, moreover, is that in verse 21 of the same chapter,[11] it is narrated that God revealed to Moses this same thing in other words:[12] surely there was no need to render him more certain about this prediction and {153} decree of God's by plausible reasons; but it was necessary that it be represented vividly in his imagination,

[6] Mt. 5:1-7:29.
[7] See, e.g., 1.23.1.
[8] I.e., of Moses.
[9] Josh 24:14-31, Jud 2.1-23.
[10] I Sam 12: 14-25, I Ki 8:12-9:9.
[11] I e., Dt. 31:21.
[12] Cf. 17.12.46-47.

as we have shown in Chapter 1.[13] This can be done in no better mode than by imagining the populace's present stubbornness, which he had often experienced, as future.

18 [7] And all the arguments of Moses' which are found in the five books are to be understood in this mode: they are not drawn from the archives of reason, but are only modes of speaking by which he expressed God's decrees effectively and imagined them vividly.

19 Still, I do not mean to deny absolutely that the Prophets could have been arguing on the basis of revelation; but I only affirm this: the more the Prophets argue legitimately, the more the knowledge of theirs which they have of the matter being revealed approaches natural knowledge; and on this basis it is discerned in the greatest degree that the Prophets have a knowledge above the natural: they speak pure dogmas, or decrees, or tenets. And therefore Moses, the greatest Prophet, made no legitimate argument. And on the other hand, in no mode do I grant that Paul's long deductions and argumentations, such as are found in the Epistle to the Romans, were written by a supra-natural revelation.

20 [8] Accordingly, the Apostles' modes of speaking as well as of discussing in the Epistles indicate very clearly that these were not written on the basis of revelation and divine command, but only on the basis of their natural judgment; and they contain nothing besides brotherly admonitions mixed with politeness (which, surely, Prophetic authority plainly abhors), as does that excuse of Paul's in Romans 15:15: *I have written you a little more audaciously, brethren.*

21 Besides, we can conclude this same thing on the basis of the fact that we do not read anywhere that the Apostles were bidden to write, but only to preach wherever they went and to confirm what was said by signs.[14]

22 For their presence and signs were absolutely required for converting peoples to the religion and confirming them in it, as Paul himself expressly indicates in Romans 1:11: *Since I greatly desire to see you*, he says, *to impart to you the gift of the Spirit, that you may be confirmed.*

23 [9] Yet here it could be interjected that we can conclude in the same mode that the Apostles did not preach as Prophets either. For when they went here and there to preach, they did not do so on the basis of an express command, as did the Prophets long before.

24 We read in the Old Testament[15] that Jonah went to preach to Nineveh and, at the same time, that he was expressly sent and **{154}** that it was revealed to him what he had to preach there.

25 So too it is narrated at length that Moses set out for Egypt as God's envoy and, at the same time, what he was bound to say to the Israelite populace and to Pharaoh the King, and what signs to make before them to win faith.[16]

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[13] Cf. 1.6.1-2 and 1.22.1-2.

[14] Mk. 16:15-20.

[15] Jon 1:1-2, 3:1-2.

[16] Ex. 3:7-4·23

26 Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were expressly bidden to preach to the Israelites.[17]

27 And, finally, the Prophets preached nothing that Scripture does not say they received from God.

28 [10] Yet we read no such thing in the New Testament, except quite rarely,[18] about the Apostles when they went to preach here and there.

29 But on the contrary, we would find some things that expressly indicate that the Apostles chose places for preaching on the basis of their own counsel—as does that quarrel that led° to a split between Paul and Barnabas: about this, see Acts 15:37-38, etc.

30 And the fact that they often tried to go somewhere in vain as well, as Paul likewise testifies in Romans 1:13, namely, *These many times I have wanted to come to you, and I was prohibited*; and 15:22, *On this account, I was impeded many times from coming to you.*

31 And, finally, in the last chapter of I Corinthians, verse 12:[19] *About my brother Apollos, moreover, I greatly sought from him that he proceed to you with the brethren; and there was altogether no will in him to come to you. When, however, there is an opportunity for him, etc.*

32 [11] Therefore, from these modes of speaking and the quarrel between the Apostles, as well as from the fact that Scripture does not attest—as it does of the ancient Prophets—that when they went somewhere to preach they went on the basis of God's command, I would have to conclude that the Apostles preached as teachers, and not as Prophets too.

33 But we will easily solve this question, provided we pay attention to the difference in calling between the Apostles and the Old Testament Prophets.

34 For the latter were not called to preach and prophesy to all nations, but only to some particular[20] ones; and on that account, they required an express and special command for each one.

35 Yet the Apostles were called to preach to absolutely all and convert all to the religion.

36 Wherever they went, therefore, they followed Christ's command; and they had no need that the matters to be preached be revealed to them before they went. They were Christ's disciples, to whom he had said, *When they hand you over, do not be worried about how or what you will speak. For what you will speak will be given to you in that hour, etc.* (see Mt. {155} 10:19-20).

37 [12] Accordingly, we conclude that the Apostles had on the basis of a special revelation only what they preached with the live voice and at the same time confirmed by signs (see what we have shown at the beginning of Ch. 2),[21] whereas what they simply taught in writing or with the live voice, with no added signs as attestations, they spoke or wrote on the basis of (natural) knowledge. About this matter, see I Corinthians

[17] Is. 6:8-10, Jer. 1:4-10, Ezek. 2:1-7

[18] E.g., Acts 16:9.

[19] I.e., I Cor. 16:12

[20] Lit.: peculiar

[21] See 2.3.1-9.

14:6.

38 Nor does it give us pause here that all Epistles start from an Apostolic proof. For the Apostles, as I will soon show, were granted not only the virtue for prophesying but also the authority for teaching.

39 [13] And for this reason, we grant that they wrote their Epistles as Apostles; and because of this, each took his start from his Apostolic proof. Or perhaps, to win over the spirit of the reader more easily and rouse it to attention, they wanted before everything else° to attest that they were men who had become known to all the faithful and who had then shown by clear attestations that they teach the true religion and the way of salvation.

40 For whatever I see being said in these Epistles about the calling of the Apostles and about the Holy and divine Spirit that they had, I see being related to their preachings that they had undertaken°—excepting only those passages in which the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit is taken for a mind that is sound, blessèd, and dedicated to God (about which we have spoken in the first Chapter).[22]

41 For example, in I Corinthians 7:40, Paul says, *Blessèd is she, moreover, if she remains thus in accordance with my tenet; I also deem, moreover, that the Spirit of God is in me.*

42 There he understands by *the Spirit of God* his own mind, as the very context of his speech indicates. For he means this: The widow who does not want to marry a second husband, I, who have decided to live celibate, judge blessèd in accordance with my own tenet; and I deem myself blessèd.

43 And other things are found in this mode which I judge superfluous to bring up here.

44 [14] Accordingly, since it is to be stated that the Epistles of the Apostles were dictated solely by the natural light, how the Apostles could teach solely on the basis of natural knowledge matters that do not fall under it is now to be seen.

45 But if we paid attention to the things we have said concerning the interpretation of Scripture in Chapter 7 of this Treatise,[23] there will be no difficulty for us here.

46 For although those things that are contained in the Bible mostly surpass our grasp, {156} still we can discuss them securely, provided we admit no other principles than those that are sought on the basis of Scripture itself. And in this same mode as well, the Apostles could conclude and elicit many things from what they saw and heard and furthermore had on the basis of revelation, and teach them to human beings if they were willing.

47 [15] Furthermore, although the religion as it was preached by the Apostles—namely, by narrating the simple history[24] of Christ—might not fall under reason, still anyone can by the natural light easily follow the sum of it, which consists mainly of moral lessons, as does Christ's whole teaching.[25]

48 Finally, the Apostles did not need a supernatural light for accommodating the

[22] See 1.20.7-12.

[23] See 7.1 10

[24] Or: story. Likewise in 11.1.48.

[25] "Cf Annotation 27." Spinoza's note.

religion—which they had confirmed beforehand by signs—to the common grasp of human beings so that it would be received by each according to[26] his spirit. And they did not need that supernatural light for admonishing human beings concerning the religion either. [16] Yet this is the aim of the Epistles: to teach and admonish human beings in the way that each of the Apostles judged best for confirming them in the religion. And what we have said a little earlier[27] is to be noted here: namely, the Apostles received not only the virtue for preaching Christ's history as Prophets—by confirming it with signs—but, besides, the authority for teaching and admonishing in the way each judged to be best as well. Paul clearly indicates both these gifts in II Timothy 1:11, in these words: *in which I have been constituted a preacher and an Apostle and a teacher of peoples.*

49 And in I Timothy 2:7: *Of which I have been constituted a preacher and an Apostle (I say the truth through Christ, I do not lie), a teacher of peoples, with faith and*—note well—*truth.*

50 [17] In these words, he clearly indicates both proofs, namely, as Apostle and as teacher; and he signifies the authority for admonishing whomever and wherever he likes in Philemon 8, in these words: *Although I have much freedom in Christ to prescribe to you what is fitting, still, etc.*

51 Here it is to be noted that, if what Paul needed to enjoin on Philemon he had received from God as a Prophet and had to prescribe as a Prophet, then in fact he would not have been permitted to change God's precept into prayers.

52 Therefore, it is necessarily to be understood that he is speaking about the freedom to admonish which was his as a Teacher and not as a Prophet.

53 [18] Still, it does not yet {157} follow clearly enough that the Apostles could have chosen the way of teaching which each judged best, but only that according to[28] their duty as Apostles they were not only Prophets but also Teachers—unless we wanted to appeal to reason, which plainly teaches that one who has the authority to teach, also has the authority to choose whatever way he wanted to teach°.

54 [19] But it will be enough to demonstrate everything on the basis of Scripture alone. For on the basis of it, the fact that each of the Apostles chose a special way is clearly established—namely, from these words of Paul in Romans 15:20: *Caring solicitously not to preach where Christ's name had been invoked, lest I built upon an alien foundation.*

55 [20] Surely if all had the same way of teaching and all built the Christian religion upon the same foundation, Paul could not for any reason have called another Apostle's foundations alien, inasmuch as they were also the same as his. But since he does call them alien, it is necessarily to be concluded that each built up the religion on a different foundation and that the same thing happened to the Apostles in their teaching as to other Teachers who have a special method of teaching, so that they always long more to teach those who plainly are raw and have not begun to learn languages and sciences—even mathematical ones, whose truth no one doubts—from

[26] Elsewhere: on the basis of.

[27] See 11.1.38.

[28] Elsewhere. on the basis of.

anyone else.

56 [21] Furthermore, if we run through those Epistles with some attention, we will see that the Apostles do agree on the religion itself, whereas they disagree rather on the foundations.

57 For, to confirm human beings in the religion and show them that salvation depends on God's grace alone, Paul taught that no one can be glorified on the basis of works, but by faith alone, and no one is justified on the basis of works (see Rom. 3:27-28), and, further, the whole teaching about predestination.

58 James in his Epistle, however, teaches on the contrary that a human being is justified on the basis of works and not on the basis of faith only (see his Ep. 2:24); and dismissing all those disputations of Paul's, he comprehends the whole teaching of the religion in a very few things.

59 [22] Finally, there is no doubt that from this—that the Apostles built up the religion on different foundations—many quarrels and schisms have arisen, by which the church has already been unceasingly vexed since the times of the Apostles and in fact will be vexed for eternity, until religion is someday at last **{158}** separated from philosophical theories and reduced to the very few and very simple dogmas that Christ taught as his own. [23] This was impossible for the Apostles, since the Gospel was unrecognized by human beings. And so, lest the newness of its teaching greatly hurt their ears, they[29] accommodated it to the mental cast of the human beings of their own time, so far as it could be done (see I Cor. 9:19-20, etc.), and structured it on foundations very well recognized and accepted[30] at that time. [24] And therefore none of the Apostles philosophized more than Paul, who was called to preach to the peoples.

60 The others, moreover, who preached to the Jews—who despise Philosophy—likewise accommodated themselves to their mental cast (about this see Gal. 2:11, etc.) and taught a religion stripped of philosophical theories.

61 Happy indeed would our age be now, moreover, if we were to see it free as well of all superstition.

[29] I e., the Apostles.

[30] Elsewhere: received.

# CHAPTER 12

## The true transcript of the Divine law, and for what reason Scripture is called Sacred, and for what reason it is the Word of God; and, finally, it is shown that, insofar as it contains the Word of God, it has reached us incorrupt

¶1 Those who consider the Bible, such as it is, as an Epistle of God sent to human beings from heaven, will no doubt shout that I have committed a sin against the Holy Spirit—by stating that God's word is faulty, truncated, adulterated, not consistent with itself, that we have only fragments of it, and, finally, that the transcript of God's compact that he compacted with the Jews has perished.

2 [2] But I do not doubt that, if they wanted to weigh the matter itself, they would stop shouting right away. For both reason itself and the tenets of the Prophets and the Apostles shout openly that God's eternal word and compact, and true religion, are divinely inscribed in the hearts of human beings, that is, in the human mind, and that the latter is God's true transcript, which he has sealed with his own seal—namely, with the idea of himself as the image of his divinity.

3 [3] To the first Jews, Religion {**159**} was handed down in writing as a law, no doubt since at that time they were considered just like children.

4 But later on, Moses (Dt. 30:6) and Jeremiah (31:33) preach a future time for the Jews when God would inscribe his law on their hearts.

5 And so, long ago it was fitting for the Jews alone, and especially the Sadducees, to fight on behalf of the law written on the tablets; yet it is hardly so for those who have it inscribed in their minds. [4] Therefore, whoever wanted to pay attention to these things would find nothing in what has been said above which conflicts with God's word—or true Religion and faith—or which can enfeeble it; but, on the contrary, it can confirm us in it, as we have also shown near the end of Chapter 10.[1] And if this were not so, plainly I would have decided to be silent about these matters; indeed, I would have readily granted that the deepest mysteries lay hidden in Scripture. But since an intolerable superstition has arisen from it, and other very pernicious disadvantages of which we have spoken in the preface to Chapter 7,[2] I have adduced that these things are hardly to be passed over—especially since religion needs no superstitous embellishments; but on the contrary, its splendor is taken away when it is

[1] See 10.2.40-42, 51.
[2] See 7.1.1-7.

embellished with such fantasies.

6 [5] Yet they would say that, although the divine law is inscribed in hearts, Scripture is nevertheless God's Word; and so it is no more permitted to say of Scripture that it is truncated and distorted than it is of God's Word. But, on the contrary, I am afraid that they are too eager to be holy and are converting Religion into superstition; indeed, that they are beginning to adore simulacra and images—that is, parchment and ink—instead of God's word.

7 [6] This I know: by stating nothing that I have not demonstrated to be true by very evident reasons, I have not said anything unworthy of Scripture or of God's word. And because of this, I could also affirm for certain that I have said nothing impious or smelling of impiety.

8 I confess that some profane human beings for whom religion is a burden could take from these words° a license to sin and, for no reason except that they yield to pleasure, conclude from them that Scripture is everywhere faulty and falsified and, consequently, of no authority.

9 [7] But it is impossible to prevent such things—in accordance with the commonplace that nothing can be said so correctly which cannot be distorted by being badly interpreted.

10 Those who want to indulge in pleasures can easily discover any cause; and those of old who had the original books°, the ark of the covenant, indeed, the Prophets and {**160**} the Apostles themselves, were no better or more compliant; but all, Jews as well as Gentiles, have always been the same, and virtue is quite rare in any age.

11 [8] Still, so as to put away every misgiving, it is to be shown here for what reason Scripture, or any dumb thing, has to be said to be sacred or divine; furthermore, what the word of God really is and that it is not contained in a certain number of books; and, finally, that Scripture, insofar as it teaches the things that are necessary for obedience and salvation, could not have been corrupted.[3]

12 For from these things, each will easily be able to judge that we have said nothing against God's word and have not given any place to impiety.

¶2 [9] A thing is called sacred and divine which is designated for exercising piety and religion; and it will be sacred only so long as human beings use it religiously. For if they were to stop being pious, at the same time it would stop being sacred as well. And if they were to dedicate it to perpetrating impious things, then the same thing that was sacred before would be rendered unclean and profane.

2 [10] For example, there was a place called by Jacob the Patriarch **בית אל** *the house of God*,[4] since he worshiped the God revealed to him there. But that same place was called by the Prophets **בית און** *the house of iniquity* (see Am. 5:5 and Hos. 10:5), since the Israelites used to sacrifice idols there at the instance of Jeroboam.[5]

3 [11] There is another example that indicates the matter very clearly.

4 Words have a certain signification through usage alone; and if, in accordance with this usage of theirs, they are so disposed as to move the human beings reading

[3] See 12.2.1-16, 17-40, 41-61.

[4] Gen. 28:19.

[5] I Ki. 12:26-33.

them to devotion, then those words will be sacred, and likewise a book written with words of such a disposition.[6]

5 But if afterward the usage perishes, so that the words do not have any signification or else° the book is completely neglected, whether from malice or since the human beings do not need it, then both the words and the book will be of no use and no holiness. Furthermore, if the same words are otherwise disposed, or else the usage prevails for taking them in a contrary signification, then both the words and the book, which before were sacred, will be impure and profane.

6 [12] From this it follows that nothing absolutely outside the mind is sacred or profane or impure except with respect to the mind° itself.

7 This is established very plainly from many passages in Scripture as well.

8 Jeremiah 7:4 (if I might bring up one or another) says that the Jews of his time falsely called the temple of Solomon the temple of God. For, as he goes on in the same {**161**} chapter,[7] God's name could belong to that temple only so long as it was frequented by human beings who worship him and defend justice. For if it is frequented by murderers, thieves, idolators and other nefarious human beings, then it is rather a den of transgressors.

9 [13] As for what happened to the ark of the covenant, Scripture says nothing about it: this I have often wondered about. Still, this is certain: it perished or was burned with the temple, even if there was nothing more sacred or of greater reverence among the Hebrews.

10 For this reason, accordingly, Scripture too is sacred and its speeches are divine so long as it moves human beings to devotion toward God. But if this is completely neglected by them, as it was by the Jews long ago, it is nothing besides parchment and ink, and is absolutely profaned by them and remains liable to corruption; and therefore, if it is corrupted or perishes, it is falsely said that the word of God is corrupted or perishes: thus at the time of Jeremiah too, it was falsely said that the temple, which at that time was the temple of God, perished in flames.[8]

11 [14] Jeremiah himself also said this about the law itself. For thus he criticized the impious of his time: **איכה תאמרו חכמים אנחנו ותורת יהוה אתנו הלא לשקר עשה עט שקר סופרים** *For what reason do you say that we are experts and the law of God is with us. Certainly it has been embellished in vain. The pen of the scribes* (was made) *in vain.*[9] That is, even though Scripture is in your possession, you say falsely that you have the law of God after you have made it inoperative.

12 [15] So too when Moses in anger broke the first tablets,[10] he hardly threw the word of God out of his hands and broke it (for who could suspect this of Moses and the word of God), but only the stones: although they were sacred before—since the covenant under which the Jews obligated themselves to obey God was inscribed on them—still, since afterward the Jews made that compact inoperative by adoring the

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[6] Lit.: with such a disposition of words.

[7] Jer 7:5-11

[8] II Ki. 25:9, Jer. 52:13.

[9] Jer. 8:8.

[10] Ex. 32:19, Dt. 9:17.

calf,[11] the stones had no holiness from then on. And from this same cause as well, the second tablets[12] could perish with the ark.

13 [16] Accordingly, it is no wonder if Moses' first originals are not extant now either, and the things we have said in earlier Chapters[13] happened to the books that we have—when the true original of the divine covenant and everything most holy could perish totally.

14 Therefore, let them stop accusing us of impiety—we have not spoken anything against the word of God or contaminated it—but let them turn their anger, if they could have one that is just, against the ancients, whose malice profaned God's ark, the temple, the law and everything **{162}** sacred, and subjected them to corruption.

15 [17] Furthermore, if, in accordance with that saying of the Apostle in II Corinthians 3:3, they have God's Epistle in them, not in ink but in God's Spirit and written not on stone tablets but on the fleshy tablets of the heart, let them stop adoring the letter and being so worried about it.

16 With these things, I deem that I have sufficiently explained for what reason Scripture is to be considered Sacred and divine.

17 [18] Now it is to be seen what is to be properly understood by **דבר יהוה** *devar Jehovah* (word of God).

18 **דבר** *davar*[14] signifies *word*, *speech*, *edict*, and *thing*.

19 We have shown in Chapter 1, moreover, from what causes any matter is said in Hebrew to be God's and is being referred to God.[15] Yet it is easily understood from these what Scripture meant to signify by God's word, speech, edict, and thing.

20 Accordingly, there is no need to repeat everything here, nor even what we have shown in Chapter 6 in the third place[16] about miracles.

21 [19] It is enough only to indicate the matter, so that what we want to say about these things here may be better understood.

22 Namely, "word of God," when it is predicated of some subject that is not God himself, properly signifies that Divine law which we have dealt with in Chapter 4[17]—that is, the universal or catholic religion of the whole human race: about this matter, see Isaiah 1:10, etc., where he teaches the true mode of living, which does not consist in ceremonies, but in charity and a true spirit; and he calls it, indiscriminately, the law and word of God.

23 [20] It is furthermore taken metaphorically for the very order of nature, and fate (since it really depends on and follows the eternal decrees of the divine nature), and especially for what the Prophets foresaw of this order—and this because they did not perceive future things through natural causes, but only as God's wishes or decrees.

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[11] Ex. 32:1-8.

[12] Ex. 34:1-4, 29.

[13] See 9.1.58-122, 10.2 28-62.

[14] Spinoza transliterates the Hebrew word in this sentence in the absolute case, and in the previous sentence in the construct case.

[15] See 1.18.1-19.3.

[16] See 6.1.9, 45-67.

[17] See 4.3.5-4 51

24 [21] Furthermore, it is also taken for every edict of any Prophet insofar as he perceived it by his special virtue, or by the Prophetic gift, and not by the common natural light—and this mainly since the Prophets were really used to perceiving God as a lawgiver, as we have shown in Chapter 4.[18]

25 [22] Accordingly, Scripture is called the word of God from these three causes: Namely, since it teaches the true religion, of which the eternal God is the author. Furthermore, since it narrates the predictions of future things as God's decrees. And, finally, since those who were really its authors mostly taught not on the basis of the common natural light but from something peculiar to themselves {**163**} and introduced a God who spoke those same things to them.

26 And although many things besides these are contained in Scripture which are merely historical and are perceived by the natural light, still the name is taken from what is more important.

27 [23] And hence we easily understand for what reason God is to be perceived as the author of the Bible—namely, on account of the true religion that is taught in it, and not that he wanted to communicate a certain number of books to human beings.

28 [24] Hence, furthermore, we can also know why the Bible is divided into the books of the Old and New Testament. Viz., before the coming of Christ, the Prophets were used to preaching religion as the law of the Fatherland and by force of the compact begun at the time of Moses. After the coming of Christ, however, the Apostles preached it to everyone as a catholic law, and solely by force of the passion of Christ. And it is not that they are different in teaching, nor that they were written as a transcript of the covenant, nor, finally, that the catholic religion, which is natural in the greatest degree, is new, unless in respect of the human beings who had not recognized it. *He was in the world*, says John the Evangelist at 1:10, *and the world did not recognize him.*

29 [25] Accordingly, although we have fewer books, of the Old as well as the New Testament, we are still not deprived of God's word (by which true religion is properly understood, as we have already said),[19] just as we do not deem that we have been deprived of it now even though we are missing many other very outstanding writings, such as the book of the Law which was guarded religiously in the Temple as the transcript of the covenant, and, besides, the books of the Wars, the Chronologies, and many other things from which those books that we have of the Old Testament were excerpted and gathered. [26] Yet this is confirmed by many reasons besides.

30 Namely, first, since the books of either Testament were not written by an express command at one and the same time for all generations, but by chance by several human beings—and this just as the time and their special constitution required—as the callings of the Prophets (who were called to admonish the impious of their time) plainly indicate, and likewise the Epistles of the Apostles.

31 [27] Second, since it is one thing to understand Scripture and the mind of the Prophets, and another to understand° the mind of God, that is, the very truth of the

[18] See 4.4.19-24.

[19] See 12.2 22, 25.

matter, as follows on the basis of what we have shown about the Prophets in Chapter 2.[20]

32 This we have shown in Chapter 6[21] to have taken place in the Histories[22] and miracles as well.

33 Yet this can hardly be said about those passages in which true religion and true virtue are being dealt with. **{164}**

34 [28] Third, since the Books of the Old Testament were chosen out of many, and gathered and approved at last by a council of Pharisees, as we have shown in Chapter 10.[23]

35 The Books of the New Testament, moreover, were taken up into the Canon by the decrees of several councils as well; still, others of their decrees, which were considered sacred by many, were also rejected as spurious.

36 Yet the members of these Councils (the Pharisees' as well as the Christians') did not consist of Prophets, but only of Teachers and experts. And still it is necessarily to be confessed that in this choosing they had the word of God as their norm. And so, before they approved all the books, they necessarily had to have acquaintance with the Word of God.

37 [29] Fourth, since the Apostles did not write as Prophets, but (as we said in the preceding Chapter)[24] as Teachers, and chose the way of teaching which they judged would be easier for their pupils whom they wanted to teach. From this, it follows that many things are contained in them (as we have also concluded at the end of the aforementioned Chapter)[25] which, by reason of the religion, we can now do without.

38 [30] Fifth, finally, since four Evangelists are found° in the New Testament—and who believes that God meant to narrate the History[26] of Christ and communicate it to human beings in writing four times°?

39 And although some things are contained in one[27] that are not found° in another, and one often helps for understanding another, still it is not to be concluded from this that everything that is narrated in these four was necessary as information and that God chose to have them written so that Christ's History would be better understood. [31] For each preached his Gospel at a different place; and each wrote what he preached simply, so that he might narrate the History of Christ lucidly, and not to explain the rest.

40 If they are now sometimes more easily and better understood from their mutual correlation, this happens by chance and only in a few passages: even though we were ignorant of them, the history would still be equally transparent, and human beings no less blessèd.

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[20] See 2.10.1-9.

[21] See 6.1.68-102.

[22] Or: stories.

[23] See 10.2.55-60.

[24] See 11 1.1-58.

[25] See 11.1.59-61.

[26] Or· Story. Likewise in 12.1.39f.

[27] I.e., Evangelist

41 [32] With these things, we have shown that Scripture is properly called the word of God only by reason of the religion, or by reason of the universal divine law. Now it remains to show that it is not faulty, distorted, or truncated.

42 Yet here I call faulty, distorted, and truncated what has been so erroneously written and constructed that the sense of the speech is unable to be investigated from the usage of the language or brought out by Scripture alone. {165} [33] For I do not want to affirm here that Scripture, insofar as it contains the Divine law, has always kept the same punctuation, the same letters, and furthermore the same words (for I leave this for the Masoretes and whoever superstitiously adores the letter to demonstrate), but only that the sense by reason of which any speech can alone be called divine has reached us incorrupt, even if the words by which it was first signified are supposed to have often been changed.

43 For this, as we have said,[28] takes nothing away from the divinity of Scripture. For Scripture would have been equally divine even if it had been written in other words or in another language.

44 [34] Accordingly, no one can doubt that for this reason we have received the divine law incorrupt.

45 For on the basis of Scripture itself, without any difficulty or ambiguity, we have perceived the sum of it to be to love God above all and one's neighbor as oneself; and this cannot be adulterated, nor written with a hasty and errant pen. For if Scripture has ever taught anything else, it necessarily has to have taught all the rest otherwise also, inasmuch as this is the foundation of the whole religion; and this having been removed, the whole architecture sinks in one fall.

46 [35] And so such a Scripture would not be the same one we are speaking about here, but another book completely.

47 Accordingly, it remains unshakeable that Scripture has always taught this; and consequently, no error that could corrupt its sense has occurred here which would not have been noticed right away by each, and no one could have distorted it whose malice in doing so would not have been obvious.

48 [36] Accordingly, since it is to be stated that this foundation is incorrupt, the same is necessarily to be confessed about the other things that follow from it without any controversy and which are fundamental as well—such as that God exists, that he provides for everything, that he is omnipotent, and that by his decree it goes well for the pious and badly for reprobates, and that our salvation depends on his grace alone.

49 For Scripture everywhere teaches—and always has to have taught—all these things transparently; otherwise all the rest would be vain and without foundation. [37] And it is to be stated that the other moral lessons are no less incorrupt, since they follow very plainly from this universal foundation.

50 Viz., to defend justice, to be of help to the poor, not to murder anyone, not to covet anything of another's, etc.

51 Nothing of these, I say, could human malice distort and old-age eliminate.

52 For whatever of these would be eliminated, their universal foundation would

[28] See 12 1 7-2.41.

right away have dictated once again {166}—and especially the lesson of charity, which is everywhere highly commended in either Testament.

53 [38] Add that, although no outrage can be devised that is so execrable as not to have been committed by someone, still there is no one who, to excuse his outrages, would try to eliminate the laws, or introduce as an eternal and salutary lesson anything that might be impious. For we see the nature of human beings so constituted that if anyone (whether he is a King or a subject) commits anything shameful, he is eager to embellish his deed with such details as to be believed to have committed nothing contrary to what is just and decorous.

54 We conclude, accordingly, that absolutely the whole universal divine law that Scripture teaches has reached our hands incorrupt.

55 [39] Yet besides these things, there are others as well which we cannot doubt to have been handed down to us in good faith.

56 Namely, the sum of the Histories[29] of Scripture, since they are well recognized by everyone.

57 The vulgar among the Jews long ago used to sing of the antiquities of the nation in Psalms.

58 The sum of the things accomplished by Christ and his passion was spread[30] right away through the whole Roman Empire as well.

59 Therefore, it is hardly to be believed—unless the greatest part of human beings have agreed to what is unbelievable—that posterity has handed down what is the chief thing in these histories otherwise than they had received it from the first human beings.

60 [40] Whatever is adulterated or faulty, therefore, could only have happened in other matters. Viz., in one or another detail of a history or Prophecy, so that the populace would be stirred more to devotion; or in one or another miracle, so as to torture[31] the Philosophers; or, finally, in theoretical matters, after they began to be introduced into the religion by schismatics, so that each would thus bolster his own fantasies by abusing divine authority.

61 But it is of little relevance to salvation whether such matters are distorted or not. This I will show explicitly in the following Chapter, even if I now deem that it is established from what has already been said, and especially from Chapter 2.[32]

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[29] Or: stories. Likewise in 12.1.59f.

[30] See Glossary, s.v "vulgar."

[31] Or: twist.

[32] See 2.10.1-9

# CHAPTER 13

## It is shown that Scripture teaches only very simple things and does not aim at anything else besides obedience; nor does it teach anything else about the divine Nature but what human beings can imitate by a certain plan of living

¶1 {167} In Chapter 2 of this Treatise,[1] we have shown that the Prophets had only a special power of imagining but not of understanding, and that God revealed to them no secrets of Philosophy but only very simple matters and accommodated himself to their preconceived opinions.

2 [2] Furthermore, we have shown in Chapter 5[2] that Scripture treats and teaches matters in the mode in which they can be most easily perceived by each. It does not deduce and chain matters together from axioms and definitions, but only says them simply and, to win faith, confirms what is said by experience alone—by miracles and histories[3]—and these are also narrated in the style and phrases by which the spirit of the plebs can be stirred the most. On this matter, see Chapter 6, concerning what is demonstrated in the third place.[3]

3 [3] Finally, we have shown in Chapter 7[4] that the difficulty of understanding Scripture is situated in the language alone, and not in the grandeur of its argument.

4 It goes along with these things that the Prophets preached not to experts but to absolutely all Jews, and that the Apostles used to teach the Gospel's teaching in Churches, where there was a common assembly of everyone. [4] From all this, it follows that the teaching of Scripture does not contain grand theories or philosophical matters, but only very simple matters, which can be perceived even by the slowest.

5 Accordingly, I cannot wonder enough about the intellects[5] of those of whom I have spoken above,[6] who see such profound mysteries in Scripture as can be explained by no human tongue, and who have furthermore introduced into religion so many

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[1] See 2.10.1-9

[2] See 5.4.1-8.

[3] See 6.1.9, 45-67.

[4] See 7.5.32-11.50.

[5] Or: mental casts See Glossary, s.v , "mental cast."

[6] See P.4.1-8, 12.1.1-6.

matters of philosophical theory that the Church would seem an Academy, and Religion a science—or, rather, an altercation.

6 [5] But what do I wonder if beings who boast of having a light above the natural one would not want to yield in respect of knowledge to Philosophers, who have nothing besides the natural light.

7 Surely I would wonder if they were to teach anything new which is part° of theory alone and which was not once very commonplace among Gentile **{168}** Philosophers (who they nevertheless say have been blind). For if you inquire what mysteries they see hiding in Scripture, you will in fact find nothing besides the comments of Aristotle or Plato or another like them, which any Idiot could often dream up more easily than the most literate could investigate from Scripture.

8 [6] For we do not mean to state absolutely that nothing that is part° of theory alone is pertinent to the teaching of Scripture. For in the previous Chapter,[7] we brought up some things of this kind as the foundations of Scripture. But I mean only that such things are quite few and quite simple.

9 [7] What they are, moreover, and by what plan they are determined, I have set out to show here. Now it will be easy for us, once we recognize that Scripture's intent has not been to teach the sciences. For hence we can easily judge that it requires nothing from human beings besides obedience, and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance.

10 [8] Furthermore, since obedience toward God consists only in love of neighbor (for one who loves his neighbor—for the purpose of obeying God—has fulfilled the Law, as Paul says in Rom. 13:8), hence it follows that no other science is commended in Scripture but that which is necessary so that all human beings can obey God in accordance with this prescription; and when this is ignored, human beings necessarily have to be stubborn, or at least without the discipline of obedience. Moreover, Scripture does not touch on other theories that do not aim at this directly, whether they involve knowledge about God or about natural matters; and therefore they are to be separated from revealed Religion.

11 [9] Yet although each, as we have said,[8] can already see these things easily, still, since a decision about the whole of Religion is pending here, I want to show the whole matter more accurately and explain it more clearly. For this it is required that we show, first of all, that an intellectual or accurate knowledge of God is not a gift common to all the faithful, as is obedience.[9]

12 Furthermore, the knowledge that God through the Prophets seeks from all universally, and which each is bound to know, is nothing but knowledge of his Divine Justice and Charity, both of which are easily demonstrated from Scripture itself.[10]

13 [10] For, first, it follows very plainly from Exodus 6:3, where God, to indicate to Moses the special grace bestowed on him, says **וארא אל אברהם אל יצחק ואל יעקב: באל שדי ושמי יהוה לא נודעתי להם** **{169}** *And I was revealed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the God Shaddai; but I was not known to them by my name Jehovah.*

[7] See 12 2 45-52.
[8] See 13 1.4.
[9] See 13 1 13-25.
[10] See 13 1.26-37.

Here, for a better explanation, it is to be noted that *El Shaddai* in Hebrew signifies the God who suffices, since he gives each what is sufficient for him. And although *Shaddai* is often taken absolutely for God, still it is not to be doubted that the name *El*, God, is always to be understood.

14 [11] Furthermore, it is to be noted that no name is found in Scripture besides Jehovah which would indicate God's absolute essence without relation to created things.

15 And therefore the Hebrews contend[11] that this alone is God's proper name, the others being appellatives. [12] And God's other names, whether they are substantives or adjectives, are really attributes that belong to God insofar as he is considered in relation to created things or is manifest through them.

16 So that **אל** *El*—or, with the paragogical letter **ה** *He*, **אלה** *Eloah*—signifies nothing else but power, as is recognized. Nor does it belong to God except by preëminence, as we call Paul the Apostle; or else the virtues of his power are being explained, as in *El* (the powerful one) the great, awesome, just, compassionate, etc.—or, for comprehending all these attributes together, this noun is usurped in the plural and with a singular[12] signification: this is very frequent in Scripture.

17 [13] Now since God says to Moses that he was not known to the fathers by the name Jehovah, it follows that they knew no attribute of God which explains his absolute essence, but only his effects and promises, that is, his power insofar as it is manifest through visible things.

18 [14] Yet God says this to Moses not to accuse them of infidelity, but on the contrary to extol their credulity and the faith by which, although they did not have the same special knowledge of God as Moses did, they nevertheless believed in God's fixed and reckoned promises—not like Moses, who, although he had grander thoughts concerning God, nevertheless doubted the divine promises and objected to God that, instead of the promised salvation, the Jews' affairs would change for the worse.[13]

19 [15] Since, therefore, the Fathers were ignorant of God's special name, and God mentions this to Moses to praise the simplicity and faith of their spirit and at the same time to remember the special grace granted to Moses,[14] hence what we have said in the first place[15] follows very plainly: human beings are not bound on the basis of a commandment to know God's **{170}** attributes; but this knowledge has been granted only as a peculiar gift to some of the faithful. Nor is it worth the effort to show this by the many attestations of Scripture. [16] For who does not see that divine knowledge has not been equal for all the faithful and that no one can be wise on the basis of a commandment, any more than he can live and be?

20 Men, women, children and all are equally able to comply on the basis of a commandment, but not to be wise.

21 [17] For if someone says that the task is not to understand God's attributes but

[11] See, e.g., Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* I.61-64.
[12] Or special (as in 13.1.19). Cf. note on "showy" at P.3.1.
[13] Ex 5:22-23.
[14] Ex. 3:11-12.
[15] See 13.1.13.

to believe altogether simply, without demonstration, surely he will be trifling. For invisible things, and those that are objects of the mind alone, can be seen by no other eyes but through demonstrations. Accordingly, those who do not have them, plainly see nothing of these matters. And so, whatever hearsay they report concerning such things does not touch or indicate their mind any more than the words of a Parrot or a puppet, which speak without mind or sense.

22 [18] But before I go on further, I am bound to say the reason why it is often said in Genesis that the Patriarchs preached in the name of Jehovah,[16] because it plainly seems to conflict with what we have already said.

23 But if we pay attention to what we have shown in Chapter 8,[17] we can easily reconcile these things. For in the aforementioned Chapter, we have shown that the writer of the Pentateuch indicates matters and places not precisely by those names that obtained at the time concerning which he speaks, but by those by which they had become better known at the time of the writer.

24 [19] God is therefore indicated in Genesis as having been preached about by the Fathers by the name of Jehovah, not since he had become known to the Fathers by this name, but since this name was of the highest reverence among the Jews. This, I say, is necessarily to be said, since in this text of ours in Exodus[18] it is expressly said that God had not been known to the Fathers by this name, and also in that, at Exodus 3:13, Moses longs to know[19] God's name: if it had been recognized before, it would at least have been recognized by him.

25 It is therefore to be concluded as we have meant to. Namely, the faithful Fathers were ignorant of this name of God, and knowledge of God is a gift of God, not a commandment.

26 [20] It is therefore time for us to go on to the second thing,[20] namely, to show that God through the Prophets seeks from human beings no other knowledge of himself but the knowledge of his divine Justice and Charity—that is, such attributes of God as human beings can imitate by a certain plan of living. Jeremiah teaches this **{171}** in very express words.

27 [21] For, speaking of King Josiah at 22:15-16, he says these things: **אביך הלא אכל ושתה ועשה משפט וצדקה בארץ אז טוב לו דן דין עני ואביון אז טוב לו הלא היא הדעת אותי נאם יהוה וגו** *Your Father ate and drank, and did judgment and justice—then* (it was) *well for him. He judged the right of the poor and the needy—then* (it was) *well for him. For* (note well) *this it is to know me, said Jehovah.* No less clear is what is said at 9:23, namely, **אך בזאת יתהלל המתהלל השכל וידוע אותי כי אני יהוה עשה חסד משפט וצדקה בארץ כי באלה חפצתי נאם יהוה** *But let anyone glory only in this: to understand me and to know that I, Jehovah, do charity, judgment, and justice in the land*; *for I delight in these things, says Jehovah.*

28 [22] This is also gathered from Exodus 34:6-7, where God reveals to Moses,

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[16] Gen. 15.2, 24:3, 7, 27.7, 28:13, 16, 21.

[17] See 8.1.20, 23-26.

[18] I.e., Ex. 6:3.

[19] Here the verb is *scire*, rather than *cognoscere* as is the preceding clause. See Glossary, s.v. "knowledge."

[20] See 13.1.11-12

who was longing to see and recognize him, no other attributes but those that explain divine Justice and Charity.

29 Finally, there ought to be noted here, first and foremost, that passage of John[21]—of which more in the following[22]—which explains God through charity alone, since no one has seen God, and which concludes that he who has charity, really has and recognizes God.

30 [23] We see, accordingly, that Jeremiah, Moses, and John comprehend in a few words° the knowledge of God which each is bound to know; and, as we have meant to say°, they place it in this alone: that God is highly just and highly merciful, or the unique model of true life.

31 [24] Along with these things goes the fact that Scripture does not expressly hand down any definition of God; nor does it prescribe that other attributes of God are to be embraced besides those just said; nor does it commend these professedly. On the basis of all these things, we conclude that the intellectual knowledge of God, which considers his nature just as it is in itself—and this nature human beings cannot imitate by a certain plan of living, nor take as an example for instituting a true plan of living—does not pertain to faith and to revealed religion in any mode; and, consequently, human beings can err about it astronomically without impropriety.

32 [25] Accordingly, it is hardly a wonder that God accommodated himself to all the imaginations and preconceptions of the Prophets, and that the faithful have fostered different tenets concerning God, as we have shown with many examples in Chapter 2.[23]

33 [26] Furthermore, it is also hardly a wonder that the Sacred scrolls everywhere speak so improperly concerning God and attribute to him hands, feet, eyes, {172} ears, a mind, and local motion, and even stirrings of the spirit besides, so that he becomes Jealous, merciful, etc.; and, finally, that they depict him as a Judge and as sitting on a royal throne, and Christ at his right hand°.

34 No doubt they speak in accordance with the grasp of the vulgar, whom Scripture is not eager to render learnèd, but obedient.

35 [27] Yet the common Theologians have contended that whatever they have been able to see by the natural light which does not agree with the divine nature is to be interpreted metaphorically, and whatever has escaped their grasp is to be accepted literally.

36 But if everything that is found of this kind in Scripture were necessarily to be interpreted and understood metaphorically, then Scripture would have been written not for the plebs and the crude vulgar, but only for those who were most expert, and mostly for Philosophers.

37 [28] Indeed, if it were impious to believe, piously and in a simplicity of spirit, these things that we have just related about God, in fact the Prophets had to have been very cautious about such phrases, at least on account of the weakness of the vulgar, and on the contrary, above all to teach God's attributes professedly and clearly, just as

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[21] I John 4:13, quoted on the title page of the *Treatise* and at 14.1.28.

[22] See esp. 14.1.23-32.

[23] See 2.5.1-10.9.

each is bound to embrace them: this nowhere came about. [29] And so it is hardly to be believed that opinions considered absolutely, without respect to works, have any piety or impiety; but a human being is to be said to believe something pious or impious only because of this: to the extent that he is moved on the basis of his opinions to obey, or assumes on the basis of those same opinions a license to sin or rebel—so that, if someone while believing true things is stubborn, he really has an impious faith, and if, on the other hand, while believing false things he is obedient, he has a pious one. For we have shown[24] that the true knowledge of God is not a commandment but a divine gift, and God has sought no other knowledge from human beings than that of his divine Justice and Charity: this knowledge is not necessary for the sciences, but only for obedience.

[24] See 13.1.9-31

## *CHAPTER 14*

# What faith is, who the faithful are, and the foundations of faith are determined, and this is at last separated from Philosophy

¶1 {173} No one who pays even slight attention can be ignorant of the fact that, for the true knowledge of faith, it is necessary first and foremost to know that Scripture has been accommodated not only to the grasp of the Prophets, but also to that of the variable and unsteadfast vulgar of the Jews. For one who embraces indiscriminately everything that is found° in Scripture as the universal and absolute teaching about God, and has not accurately known what has been accommodated to the grasp of the vulgar, cannot help confusing the opinions of the vulgar with the divine teaching, and passing off the comments and wishes of human beings as divine lessons, and abusing the authority of Scripture.

2 [2] Who, I say, does not see that this is the greatest cause of why there are so many sectarians, and why they teach such contrary opinions as lessons of faith and confirm them with many examples of Scripture, so that meanwhile among the Dutch it will pass into the usage of a proverb: Geen ketter sonder letter.[1]

3 For the Sacred Books have not been written by one man alone, nor for the vulgar of one age, but by several men of different mental cast and different epochs, whose time span°, if we would like to compute it all, would be discovered to be almost two thousand years, and perhaps much longer.

4 [3] Still, we do not mean to accuse those sectarians of impiety—in that they accommodate the words of Scripture to their own opinions. For just as Scripture was once accommodated to the grasp of the vulgar, so too each is permitted to accommodate it to his own opinions if he sees that by that plan he can obey God with a more complete consent of the spirit in things that have to do with justice and charity. [4] But we do therefore accuse them of not wanting to grant this same freedom to others, but persecuting as God's enemies all who do not feel as they do, however highly honorable and compliant with true virtue they may be, and on the other hand cherishing as God's chosen those who cater to them, though they are very weak-spirited: in fact, nothing more wicked and more pernicious to a republic can be devised than this.

5 [5] Therefore, for it to be established how far each's {174} freedom to think what he wants extends by reason of faith, and whom we are bound to look on as faithful even though they may think different things, faith and its fundamentals are to be determined. This I have set out to do in this Chapter, and at the same time to separate

[1] Dutch: "No heretic without a text."

faith from Philosophy, which has been the chief intent of the whole work.

6 That I may show these things in order, therefore, let us repeat the highest intent of the whole of Scripture; for it will indicate to us the true norm for determining the faith.

7 [6] We have said in an earlier Chapter[2] that the intent of Scripture is only to teach obedience.

8 This no one can deny.

9 For who does not see that either Testament is nothing besides the training of obedience? Or that either one aims at anything else but that human beings obey out of a true spirit?

10 [7] For—if I may omit what I have shown in the previous Chapter[3]—Moses was not eager to convince the Israelites by reason, but to obligate them by a compact, by oaths, and by benefits; furthermore, he threatened the populace with punishment for not complying with the laws, and exhorted them to do so by rewards. All these are means not to the sciences, but to obedience alone.

11 [8] The Gospel teaching, moreover, contains nothing besides a simple faith: namely, to believe in God and revere him or, what is the same thing, to obey God.

12 I therefore have no need to demonstrate a very manifest matter by compiling the texts of Scripture which commend obedience, very many of which are found in either Testament.

13 [9] Furthermore, what anyone has to execute so as to gratify God, Scripture teaches as clearly as possible in very many passages,[4] namely, that the whole law consists in this alone: in love toward one's neighbor. Therefore, no one can deny as well that one who on the basis of God's commandment cherishes his neighbor as himself is really obedient and blessèd in accordance with the law; and one who, on the other hand, hates or neglects him is rebellious and stubborn.

14 [10] Finally, it is confessed by everyone that Scripture has been written and divulged not for experts, but for every human being of whatever age and kind; and on the basis of these things alone it very plainly follows that we are bound to believe nothing else on the basis of the bidding of Scripture but what is absolutely necessary for executing this commandment.

15 Therefore, this very commandment is the sole norm of the whole catholic faith; and all the dogmas of the faith—which anyone is bound to embrace—are to be determined through it alone. **{175}**

16 [11] Because this is as manifest as can be, and because on the basis of this foundation alone, or by reason alone, everything can be legitimately deduced, let anyone judge how it could have happened that so many dissensions have arisen in the Church, and whether there might have been other causes than those that have been said at the beginning of Chapter 7.[5]

17 [12] Accordingly, these same things compel me here to show the mode and plan

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[2] See 13.1.9.

[3] See 5.1.13-14, 5 3.1-9.

[4] E g , Lev. 19 18, Mt. 5:44, etc.

[5] See 7.1 1-8

for determining the dogmas of faith on the basis of this discovered foundation. For unless I do so, and determine the whole matter by certain rules, I will deservedly be believed to have achieved little so far, since anyone will be able to introduce whatever he wanted under this very pretext—that it is a necessary means for obedience—especially when it is a question of the divine attributes.

18 [13] Accordingly, that I may show the whole matter in order, I will begin from a definition of faith, which has to be defined on the basis of this given foundation as follows: namely, it is nothing else but to think such things about God that, when they are ignored, obedience toward God is removed; and when this obedience is posited, they are necessarily posited.

19 This definition is so clear, and follows so manifestly on the basis of what has just been demonstrated, that it needs no explanation.

20 [14] What follows from these things, moreover, I will now show in a few words°.

21 Viz., first, faith is not salutary per se, but only by reason of obedience; or, as James 2:17 says, faith per se without works is dead. Concerning this matter, see the whole aforementioned chapter of this Apostle.[6]

22 Second, it follows that one who is truly obedient necessarily has a true and salutary faith.

23 [15] For, obedience being posited, we have said that faith is also necessarily posited; the same Apostle also says this expressly at 2:18, namely, in these words: *Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith on the basis of my works.*

24 And John in Epistle I, 4:7-8: *Whoever cherishes* (his neighbor) *is born of God and recognizes God; whoever does not cherish him does not recognize God. For God is Charity.*

25 [16] From these things, it again follows that we can judge no one to be faithful or faithless except on the basis of works. Namely, if the works are good, however he may dissent in his dogmas from the other faithful, he is still faithful. And on the contrary, if the works are evil, however he may agree in words, he is still faithless.

26 For once obedience is posited, faith is necessarily posited; and faith without works is dead.

27 [17] The same John also teaches this expressly in verse 13 of the same chapter.[7]

28 *Through this*, he says, *we know that we remain in him and he remains in us: that he has given us of his Spirit*, {176} namely, Charity.

29 For he had said before,[8] God is Charity, so that he concludes (on the basis of the principles of his then accepted) that he who has Charity really has God's Spirit.

30 Indeed, since no one sees God, he therefore concludes that no one experiences[9] or turns his spirit to God except solely on the basis of Charity toward his neighbor; and so, no one can acknowledge any other attribute of God either, besides this Charity insofar as we participate in it.

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[6] I.e., Jas. 2:1-26.

[7] I e., I John 4:13.

[8] See 14.1.24.

[9] Lit.: feels.

31 [18] If these reasons are not peremptory, they still explain John's mind clearly enough; but far more clearly does what is said in 2:3-4 of the same Epistle, where he teaches in very express words what we mean here.

32 *And through this*, he says, *we know that we recognize him, if we observe his precepts. He who says "I recognize him" and does not observe his precepts is a liar, and there is no truth in him.*

33 [19] Yet from these things it follows, again, that those who persecute honorable men who love Justice—on account of their dissenting from the former and not defending the same dogmas of faith as they do—are really the Antichrists. For those who love Justice and Charity, we know through this alone to be the faithful. And he who persecutes the faithful is an Antichrist.

34 [20] It follows, finally, that faith does not require true dogmas so much as pious ones, that is, such as move the spirit toward obedience—even though among them there may be very many that do not have even a shadow of truth, yet so long as he who embraces them is ignorant of their being false. Otherwise he would necessarily be rebellious.

35 For how could it happen that someone who loves Justice and is eager to follow God will adore as divine what he knows to be alien to the divine nature. [21] Yet human beings can err in simplicity of spirit; and Scripture, as we have already shown,[10] does not condemn ignorance, but stubbornness alone. Indeed, this necessarily follows solely from the definition of faith, all the parts of which have to be sought from the universal foundation of faith, which has already been shown,[11] and from the unique intent of the whole of Scripture—unless we prefer to mix in our own wishes. But these things do not expressly require true dogmas, but such as are necessary for obedience—as confirm the spirit in love toward one's neighbor: for this reason alone, each is in God (if I may speak with John) and God is in each.

36 [22] Accordingly, since each's faith is to be considered pious or impious by reason of obedience or stubbornness only and not by reason of truth or falsity, and no one will doubt that the common mental cast of human beings {177} is quite varied and everyone does not acquiesce equally in everything—but opinions regulate human beings in a different mode, inasmuch as those that move this one to devotion move another to laughter and contempt—hence it follows that no dogmas over which there can exist[12] controversy among honorable men pertain to the catholic or universal faith. [23] For those dogmas° that are of that nature can be pious in one man's regard[13] and impious in another's regard, inasmuch as the dogmas° are to be judged by works alone.

37 Therefore, only those dogmas pertain to the catholic faith which obedience toward God posits absolutely; and if these are ignored, obedience is absolutely impossible. Concerning the rest, however, since each recognizes himself best, he has to think as he sees best for confirming himself in the love of Justice.

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[10] See 13.1 9-10, 34, 14 1.13.

[11] See 12 2 45-52

[12] Lit.: be given

[13] Elsewhere: respect Likewise later in the sentence

38 [24] And for this reason, I deem that no place is left for controversies in the Church. Nor am I now afraid to enumerate the dogmas of the universal faith, or the fundamentals of the intent of Scripture as such, all of which (as they very plainly follow from what we have shown in these two Chapters)[14] have to aim at this, namely, that there exists[15] a highest being who loves Justice and Charity and whom all, so that they may be saved, are bound to obey and adore by the cultivation[16] of Justice and Charity toward their neighbor—and hence all the dogmas are easily determined; and so there are no others besides these.

39 [25] Viz., first, God exists, that is, a highest being, highly just and merciful, or the model of true life. For he who does not know or does not believe that God exists cannot obey him or know him to be judge.

40 Second, he is unique. For this, too, no one can doubt to be absolutely required for the highest devotion, admiration, and love toward God.

41 For devotion, admiration, and love will arise only from the excellence of one over the rest.

42 [26] Third, he is present everywhere, or all things are open to him. If matters were believed to be hidden from him, or it were ignored that he sees all things, the equity of his Justice by which he directs all things might be doubted, or else it would be ignored.

43 Fourth, he holds the highest right and dominion over all things, and he does not do anything by being compelled to by right, but he does everything on the basis of an absolute preference and a special grace. For everyone is bound to obey him absolutely, whereas he obeys no one.

44 [27] Fifth, worship of God and obedience to him consist in Justice and Charity alone, or in love toward one's neighbor.

45 Sixth, only all who obey God by this plan of living are saved, {**178**} whereas the rest, who live under the imperium of pleasure, are lost. If human beings were not to believe this firmly, there would not be any cause why they would prefer to comply with God rather than with the pleasures.

46 [28] Finally, seventh, God forgives the sins of the penitent. For there is no one who does not sin. Therefore, if this were not stated, all would despair of their salvation; nor would there be any reason why they would believe God to be merciful. One who firmly believes this, however—viz., that from the mercy and grace by which he directs all things, God forgives the sins of human beings—and because of this is more enflamed with God's love, really acknowledges Christ in accordance with the Spirit, and Christ is in him.

47 [29] Yet no one can be ignorant of the fact that all these things are necessary as information first and foremost so that human beings, none excepted, can obey God on the basis of the prescription of the Law as explained above;[17] for if any of these dogmas is removed, obedience too is removed.

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[14] .e., Ch. 13-14

[15] Lit.: is given. In 14.1.39, in contrast, "exists" is *existere* rather than *dari*.

[16] See Glossary, s.v. "worship."

[17] See 14.1.34-37.

48 [30] Otherwise, what God, or that model of true life, is, has nothing to do with faith—whether he is fire, Spirit, light, thought, etc.—and so too for what reason he is the model of true life: whether it is on account of his having a just and merciful spirit, or since all things are and act through him, and consequently we understand ourselves through him as well, and through him we see that the true is the equitable and the good. Whatever anyone will say about these things is all the same.

49 [31] Furthermore, it also is nothing to faith if someone believes that God is everywhere in accordance with his essence or in accordance with his power; that he directs matters on the basis of freedom or by the necessity of nature; that he prescribes laws as a prince or teaches eternal truths; that a human being obeys God on the basis of freedom of the will[18] or on the basis of the necessity of the divine decree; or, finally, that the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil are natural or supra-natural. [32] By what reason each understands these and similar things, I say, is relevant to nothing with respect to faith—so long as he concludes nothing with the aim of taking a greater license to sin, or of becoming less obedient to God. Indeed, as we have already said above,[19] each is bound to accommodate these dogmas of faith to suit his own grasp, and to interpret them to himself in the mode in which it seems easier to him to be able to embrace them without any hesitation, but with the spirit's full consent, so that consequently he obeys God with the spirit's complete consent. [33] For, as we have already admonished as well,[20] just as long ago faith was revealed and written down in accordance with the grasp and opinion of the Prophets and {179} the vulgar of that time, so too each is now bound to accommodate it to his own opinions, so that he might thus embrace it without any conflict of the mind and without any hesitation. For we have shown[21] that faith does not require truth so much as piety, and it is not pious and salutary except by reason of obedience. And consequently, no one is faithful except by reason of obedience.

50 Therefore, he who shows the best reasons does not necessarily show the best faith, but he who shows the best works of Justice and Charity does.

51 [34] How salutary and how necessary this Teaching is in a republic, so that human beings might live peacefully and harmoniously—and, I say, how many and how great the causes of disturbances and wicked deeds which it might prevent—I leave for everyone to judge.

52 [35] Yet before I go on further, this ought to be noted: from the things shown just now, we can easily reply to the objections that we raised in Chapter 1[22] when we said[23] words about God speaking with the Israelites from Mount Sinai. [36] For although the voice that the Israelites heard could give those human beings no philosophical or mathematical certainty concerning God's existence, still it was enough for carrying them off into admiration for God as they had known him beforehand

[18] Elsewhere: decision.
[19] See 13.1.4.
[20] See 13.1.4.
[21] See 14.1.34-37.
[22] See 1 9 1-15.
[23] Lit.: made.

and for prodding them to obedience, which was the aim of that spectacle.

53 For God did not mean to teach the Israelites the absolute attributes of his essence (for he revealed none at that time), but to break their stubborn spirit and pull them toward obedience. And therefore he assailed them not with reasons, but with the sound of trumpets, with thunder and with lightning.

54 (See Ex. 20:20.)[24]

¶2 [37] It is now left for me to show at last that there is no commerce and no affinity between Theology and Philosophy: no one can now be ignorant of this who knows the aim and foundation of these two faculties, which surely disagree totally. [38] For the goal of Philosophy is nothing but truth, while that of Faith, as we have abundantly shown, is nothing but obedience and piety.

2 Furthermore, the foundations of Philosophy are common notions; and these have to be sought on the basis of nature alone.

3 As for those of Faith, however, they are histories[25] and language, and they are to be sought on the basis of Scripture and revelation alone, as we have shown in Chapter 7.[26]

4 [39] Faith, therefore, grants to each the highest freedom of philosophizing, **{180}** so that he might think whatever he wants concerning any matters without impropriety; and it condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach opinions urging stubbornness, hatreds, quarrels, and anger. And on the other hand, it only considers those faithful who urge Justice and Charity in accordance with the strength of their reason and faculties.

5 [40] Finally, since these things that we have shown are the chief things that I am aiming at in this treatise, I want, before going on further, to ask the reader most earnestly to deign to read these two Chapters[27] more attentively, and weigh them again and again. And let him be persuaded for himself that we have not written in the spirit of introducing new things, but of correcting depravities that at some time we hope to see corrected at last.

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[24] Possibly Gebhardt's text is erroneous here, and Spinoza means Ex. 20:18, as Akkerman suggests *ad loc*, 763, n. 25. Ex 20:20, however, reads, more or less literally: *Fear not, for God has come in order to test you and in order that fear of him may be in your face, lest you sin.*

[25] Or: stories.

[26] See 7.1.10-17.

[27] I.e., Ch. 13-14.

# CHAPTER 15

## It is shown that Theology does not serve as handmaid to Reason, nor Reason to Theology; and the reason by which we persuade ourselves of the authority of Sacred Scripture

¶1 Those who do not know how to separate Philosophy from Theology dispute whether Scripture has to serve as handmaid to reason, or reason, on the contrary, to Scripture. That is, does the sense of Scripture have to be accommodated to reason, or reason, in truth, to Scripture? Yet the latter is defended by the skeptics, who deny the certainty of reason; the former, by the dogmatists.

2 [2] But that the dogmatists° as well as the skeptics° err totally is established on the basis of what has already been said.

3 For whether we follow either tenet, it is necessary to corrupt either reason or Scripture.

4 For we have shown[1] that Scripture does not teach philosophical matters, but piety alone; and everything that is contained in it has been accommodated to the grasp and preconceived opinions of the vulgar.

5 [3] One who wants to accommodate it to Philosophy, therefore, will surely attach much to the Prophets which they would not have been thinking of even in a dream, and will interpret their mind erroneously.

6 One who on the contrary, however, makes reason and Philosophy the handmaid of Theology, is bound to admit the prejudices of the ancient vulgar as divine matters, and occupy and blind the mind with them. And so either will act unsoundly[2]—the former, without reason; the latter, in truth, with reason.

7 [4] The first among the Pharisees who openly stated that Scripture {181} is to be accommodated to reason was Maimonides (whose tenet we recounted in Ch. 7 and refuted with many arguments);[3] and although this author is of great authority among them, still the greatest part of them fall away from him in this matter, and walk in the tenet of a Rabbi Judah Alfakhar, who, longing to avoid the error of Maimonides, fell into another one contrary to it.

8 [5] He stated[4] that reason has to serve as handmaid to Scripture and submit to it

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[1] Cf. 14.2.1-4.

[2] Or: go insane

[3] See 7.11.21-39.

[4] "N.B. I remember that I once read this in an Epistle against Maimonides which is found° among the Epistles that are said to be Maimonides'." Spinoza's note See the annotated English translation by Jacob Adler in "Letters of

completely. He did not think anything in Scripture is to be explained metaphorically on account of its literal sense's conflicting with reason, but only on account of reason's conflicting° with Scripture, that is, with its clear dogmas. And hence he formulated this universal rule: viz., whatever Scripture teaches dogmatically[5] and affirms in express words is to be admitted on its authority alone as absolute truth. Nor will any other dogma be found in the Bible which conflicts with it directly, but only by implication[6]—since Scripture's modes of speaking often seem to suppose something contrary to what it teaches expressly. And on that account, only those same passages are to be explained metaphorically.

9 [6] For example, Scripture clearly teaches that God is unique (see Dt. 6:4); and no other passage is found anywhere directly affirming that there exist[7] many Gods. Yet there are many passages° where God speaks of himself and the Prophets speak of God in a plural number that supposes only a mode of speaking and does not indicate that the intent of the speech is that there are many Gods; and therefore all these things are to be explained metaphorically—not since it conflicts with reason that many exist, but since Scripture itself directly affirms that God is unique.

10 [7] So too, since Scripture at Deuteronomy 4:15 affirms directly (as he deems) that God is incorporeal, therefore—on the basis of the authority of this passage alone, and not on that of reason—we are bound to believe that God does not have a body; and consequently it is on the basis of Scripture's authority alone that we are bound to explain metaphorically all the passages that attribute hands, feet, etc., to God and where only the mode of the speaker seems to suppose that God is corporeal.

11 [8] This is the tenet of that author, whom I praise insofar as he means to explain Scripture through Scripture. Yet I wonder that a man endowed with reason is eager to destroy it.

12 It is indeed true **{182}** that Scripture is to be explained through Scripture, so long as we are laboring solely from the sense of the speeches and the mind of the Prophets; but after we have extracted the true sense, judgment and reason are necessarily to be used so that we may offer our assent to it.

13 [9] For if reason is plainly to be surrendered even though it disapproved of Scripture, I ask, do we have to do so with reason, or without it—as blind men?

14 If the latter, surely we are acting foolishly and without judgment. If the former, we are therefore embracing Scripture solely from the imperium of reason: we would not be embracing it, therefore, if reason conflicted with it.

15 [10] And I ask: Who can embrace something with the mind while reason disapproves? For what else is it to deny something with the mind, but that reason disapproves? And, in fact, I cannot wonder enough that they want to surrender reason, the greatest gift and the divine light, to dead letters, which may even have been perverted by human malice; and that it is figured to be no wickedness to speak

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Judah Alfakhar and David Kimchi," *Studia Spinozana* 12 (1996): 150-64.

[5] "Cf. Annotation 28." Spinoza's note.

[6] Lit.: through a consequence. Likewise in 15.1.21, 28, 29, 33.

[7] Lit.: are given Likewise later in 15.1.9.

disrespectfully[8] against the mind, the true transcript of God's word, and to state that it is corrupt, blind and lost, yet it is considered the greatest wickedness to be thinking such things about the letter and idol[9] of the word of God.

16 [11] They deem that it is pious to have no faith in reason and in proper judgment, and impious to doubt the faith of those who have handed down the Sacred Books to us: indeed, this is mere foolishness, not piety.

17 But I ask: What is worrying them? What are they afraid of? Can Religion and faith not be defended unless human beings intentionally ignored everything and said farewell to reason completely? In fact, if they believe this, they fear Scripture rather than have faith in it.

18 [12] But far be it for Religion and piety to want to serve as handmaid to reason, or reason to Religion, and for either to be unable to hold onto its own realm with the utmost harmony. Of this matter presently,[10] for here it is appropriate to examine first of all the Rule of that Rabbi.[11]

19 [13] As we have said,[12] he means that we are bound to embrace as true or reject as false everything that Scripture affirms or denies; furthermore, that Scripture never affirms or denies in express words anything contrary to what it has affirmed or denied in another passage.

20 No one can ignore how rashly these two things are said.

21 [14] For even if I omit that he does not notice how Scripture consists of different books, how it has been written at different times for different human beings and, furthermore, by different authors, then there is this other fact: he has stated these things on his very own authority, whereas neither reason nor Scripture says any such thing. {183} For he would have to show that all the passages that do not conflict with others except by implication can be advantageously explained metaphorically by the nature of the language and the rationale of the passage, and that Scripture has come into our hands incorrupt.

22 [15] But let us examine the matter in order; and indeed about the first thing,[13] I ask: What if reason were to protest? Are we nevertheless bound to embrace as true or reject as false what Scripture affirms or denies? Yet perhaps he would add that nothing is found in Scripture which would conflict with reason.

23 But I insist that it expressly affirms and teaches that God is jealous (namely, in the Decalogue itself,[14] in Ex. 34:14, in Dt. 4:24, and in many other passages). And yet this conflicts with reason; nevertheless it is therefore to be posited as true.

24 Indeed, if some things are found in Scripture which suppose that God is not jealous, they are necessarily to be explained metaphorically so as to be seen to suppose no such thing.

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[8] Lit.: unworthily.

[9] I.e., image. Cf. 12.1.2.

[10] See 15.1.35-64.

[11] I.e., Rabbi Judah Alfakhar.

[12] See 15 1.8-11.

[13] I.e., that we are bound to embrace as true or reject as false everything that Scripture affirms or denies. See 15.1.19.

[14] Ex. 20:5, Dt. 5:9.

25 [16] So too, Scripture says expressly that God descended onto Mount Sinai (see Ex. 19:20, etc.); and it attributes to him other local motions[15] and nowhere teaches expressly that God is not moved, and so this too is to be admitted by everyone as true; and the fact that Solomon says that God is not to be contained in any place (see I Ki. 8:27)—although he has not expressly stated it, but it only follows from God's not being moved—is necessarily to be explained so as not to seem to take away local motion from God.

26 [17] So too the heavens are to be taken as God's habitat and throne, since Scripture expressly affirms it.[16]

27 And many things are said in this mode in accordance with the opinions of the Prophets and the vulgar, and which reason and Philosophy alone and not Scripture teach to be false: still, in the opinion of that author all of these are to be supposed as being true, since there is no consulting with reason in these matters.

28 [18] Furthermore, he affirms falsely that one passage conflicts with another only by implication, not directly.

29 For Moses directly affirms that *God is fire* (see Dt. 4:24) and directly denies that God has any likeness to visible things (see Dt. 4:12);[17] and if he[18] were to retort that the latter passage° does not deny that God is fire directly but only by implication, so that it is to be accommodated to the former passage° lest it seem to deny it, let us go and grant that God is fire; or rather, lest we act unsoundly[19] with him, let us dismiss these things and bring forward another example into evidence. {**184**}

30 [19] Namely, Samuel[20] directly denies that God repents of a pronouncement[21] (see I Sam. 15:29); and Jeremiah, on the contrary, affirms that God repents of the good and evil which he has decreed (see Jer. 18:8, 10). What? Are these not directly opposed to each other? Which of these two does he therefore want to explain metaphorically?

31 Either tenet is universal and contrary to the other. What the one directly affirms, the other directly denies.

32 Accordingly, he is bound by his own rule to embrace as true and at the same time to reject as false this same thing.

33 [20] Furthermore, how is it relevant that one passage does not conflict with another directly but only by implication, if the implication is clear and the details and nature of the passage do not allow for metaphorical explanations: many of these passages° are found in the Bible—see Chapter 2 about them (where we have shown that the Prophets had different and contrary opinions),[22] and especially all those contradictions that we have shown to be in the Histories (namely, in Ch. 9 and 10).

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[15] I.e , changes in or of place.

[16] Is. 66 1, Acts 7:49

[17] Cf 7 3.5-12

[18] I.e., Rabbi Judah Alfakhar

[19] Or: go insane

[20] "See Annotation 29." Spinoza's note.

[21] See Glossary, s.v. "tenet."

[22] See 2.7.12-10.1.

34 [21] I do not have need to recount them all here, for what has been said is sufficient to show the absurdities that follow from this tenet and rule, and to show its falsity and the hastiness of its author.

35 We have therefore exploded both this tenet and that of Maimonides', and we have established unshakeably that Theology is not bound to serve as handmaid to reason, nor reason to Theology, but each obtains its own realm.

36 Namely, as we have said,[23] reason is the realm of truth and wisdom, whereas Theology is that of piety and obedience. [22] For the power of reason, as we have already shown,[24] does not extend so far as to be able to determine that human beings could be blessèd by obedience alone, without an understanding of things. Theology, however, dictates nothing but this and commands nothing but obedience; and it[25] wants—and can want—nothing contrary to reason. [23] For it determines the dogmas of the Faith (as we have shown in the preceding Chapter)[26] only to the extent that obedience is sufficient. Precisely how they are to be understood by reason of their truth, however, it leaves for reason to determine—which is really the light of the mind, without which it sees nothing but dreams and fantasies.

37 [24] Yet by Theology here, I understand precisely revelation, insofar as it indicates the goal at which we have said Scripture aims (namely, the plan and mode of obeying, or the dogmas of true piety and faith), that is, what is properly called **{185}** God's word, which does not consist in a certain number of books (on this matter, see Ch. 12).[27]

38 For if you look at its precepts or lessons about life, a Theology so accepted[28] agrees with reason; and if you look at its intent and aim, you will find out nothing in reality which conflicts with it; and on that account, it is universal for everyone.

39 [25] As for what pertains to the whole of Scripture in general, we have already shown in Chapter 7[29] as well that its sense is to be determined on the basis of its history alone, and not on the basis of a universal history of Nature, which is the foundation of Philosophy alone. Nor does it have to give us pause if, after we have thus investigated its true sense, we found out that here and there it conflicts with reason.

40 For whatever is found of this kind in the Bible, or which human beings in keeping with charity can be ignorant of, we know for certain does not touch Theology or the word of God; and consequently each can think whatever he wants concerning them, without impropriety.

41 We therefore conclude simply that Scripture is not to be accommodated to reason, nor reason to Scripture.

42 [26] Be that as it may, since we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the

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[23] Cf. 14.2.1-4

[24] See 15.1.4-5, with 7.11.21-39

[25] I.e., theology. Likewise for the three instances of "it" which follow in 15.1.36.

[26] See 14.1.7-14.

[27] See 12.2.17-27.

[28] Elsewhere. received.

[29] See 7 1 23-5.22.

foundation of Theology—that human beings are saved by obedience alone—is true or false, it can also be objected to us: Why then do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, as blind men, therefore we too act foolishly and without judgment.

43 [27] For if, on the other hand, we wanted to state that this foundation can be demonstrated by reason, then Theology will be a part of Philosophy and is not to be separated from it.

44 But to these things, I answer that I am stating absolutely that this fundamental dogma of Theology cannot be investigated by the natural light, or at least that there has been no one who has demonstrated it; and therefore revelation has been necessary in the greatest degree. Yet we can nevertheless use our judgment so that we may embrace what has already been revealed with at least a moral certainty. [28] With a moral certainty, I say, for it is not that we should expect that we could be more certain of it than the Prophets themselves, to whom it was first revealed and yet whose certainty was only moral, as we have already shown in Chapter 2 of this Treatise.[30]

45 [29] Those who endeavor to show the authority of Scripture by mathematical demonstrations, therefore, err in every way.[31]

46 For the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the Prophets; and so it can be demonstrated by no stronger arguments than those by which the Prophets **{186}** were once used to persuading the populace of their authority. Indeed, our certainty concerning that authority can be established on no other foundation but that on which the Prophets based their own certainty and authority.

47 [30] For we have shown[32] that the whole certainty of the Prophets consists of these three things.

48 Namely, first, a distinct and vivid imagination; second, a Sign; third—finally and especially—a spirit inclined to the equitable and the good. Nor was it based on any other reasons; and so they could not demonstrate their authority by any other reasons—not even to the populace to whom they once spoke with a live voice, nor to us to whom they speak in writing.

49 [31] Yet the first—that they imagined things vividly—could only be established for the Prophets; therefore, our whole certainty about revelation can and has to be based only on the other two things, namely, the Sign and the Teaching.

50 This, Moses expressly teaches as well.

51 [32] For Deuteronomy 18[33] bids the populace to obey a Prophet who gives a true sign in the name of God; but if he predicts something falsely, even if in the name of God, it still bids that he be condemned to death; and so too one who wanted to seduce the populace from the true religion, even though he has confirmed his authority by signs and portents. Concerning this matter, see Deuteronomy 13,[34] [33] where it follows that a true Prophet is distinguished[35] from a false one by the teaching and the

[30] See 2 3 8, 4.2.
[31] Lit. the whole way.
[32] See 2.3.8-4.5.
[33] Dt 18:15-22
[34] Dt 13:2-6
[35] Lit discerned

miracle together. For, such a Prophet Moses declares to be a true one, and bids believing in him without any fear of fraud. But those who predict something falsely even though in the name of God, or who have taught false Gods even though they have done true miracles, he says are false and guilty of a capital crime°.[36]

52 [34] Therefore, only because of this are we, too, bound to believe in Scripture, that is, in the Prophets themselves: it is, no doubt, on account of the teaching confirmed by the signs.

53 For since we see that the Prophets commend Charity and Justice above all, and aim at nothing else, we here conclude that it has not been by an evil ruse, but on the basis of a true spirit, that they taught that human beings become blessèd through obedience and faith; and since they have moreover confirmed this with signs, we here persuade ourselves that they have not said it rashly, nor were they obsessing while they prophesied. [35] In this, we are even more confirmed when we pay attention to the fact that they taught nothing moral which would not agree very plainly with reason. For it is not rashly that God's word in the Prophets agrees altogether with God's same word speaking in ourselves.

54 But these things, I say, we are equally certain of on the basis of the Bible, as the Jews concluded these same things long ago on the basis of the live voice of the Prophets. **{187}**

55 [36] For we have shown above, at the end of Chapter 12,[37] that Scripture has reached our hands incorrupt by reason of its teaching and chief histories.

56 Therefore, although this foundation of the whole of Theology and Scripture is unable to be shown by a mathematical demonstration, we embrace it with a sound judgment nevertheless.

57 [37] For it is ignorance, indeed, still not to want to embrace that which has been confirmed by the attestations of so many Prophets, and on the basis of which great solace arises for those who are not so strong in reason and no mediocre utility follows for the Republic, and which we can believe in absolutely without danger or harm—and solely because it cannot be demonstrated mathematically. As if, in truth, we were to admit nothing as true for setting up[38] our° life wisely which could be called into doubt from any reason for doubting it°, or in that most of our actions were not rather uncertain and full of hazard.

58 [38] I do confess that those who deem that Philosophy and Theology contradict each other—and who on that account figure that either should be thrust out of its realm and that one or the other is to be said farewell to—are not without reason eager to lay firm foundations for Theology and to endeavor to demonstrate it mathematically.

59 For who but a desperate and insane person° would want to say farewell rashly to reason, or despise the arts and sciences and deny the certainty of reason? [39] Yet meanwhile we cannot simply excuse them, since they want to call on reason for help in repelling reason and endeavor by a certain reason to render it uncertain.

60 Indeed, while they are eager to show the truth and authority of Theology by

[36] Lit.: of death

[37] See 12.2.29-61, above.

[38] Lit : instituting. For the expression, cf. Terence, *Andria* I.67. See also 17.3.4.

mathematical demonstrations and to diminish the authority of reason and the natural light, they do nothing but draw Theology itself under the imperium of reason, and plainly seem to suppose that the authority of Theology has no splendor unless it is illuminated by the natural light of reason.

61 [40] And if, on the other hand, they boast that they acquiesce altogether in the inward attestation of the Holy Spirit and call on reason for help from no other cause than on account of unbelievers—so as to convince them—still, no faith whatever is to be put in what they say; for now we can easily show that they say it either on the basis of their° emotions or on that of vainglory.

62 [41] For it follows very plainly from the previous Chapter[39] that the Holy Spirit does not give attestation except concerning good works. Therefore Paul, in Galatians {188} 5:22, also calls these the fruit of the Holy Spirit; and this is really nothing else but the acquiescence of the spirit which arises in the mind from good actions.

63 [42] Concerning the truth and certainty of matters that are part° of theory alone, however, no Spirit gives attestation besides reason, which alone, as we have already shown,[40] has vindicated[41] for itself the realm of truth.

64 If, therefore, they contend that someone has some Spirit besides this which renders them certain about the truth, they boast of it falsely and are speaking only out of a prejudice of the emotions, or are fleeing to the sacred in view of the great fear that they may be conquered by the Philosophers and publicly exposed to laughter. But it is in vain; for what altar can one prepare for himself who has committed treason against reason? [43] But I dismiss them, since I deem that I am satisfied in my cause for having shown for what reason Philosophy is to be separated from Theology, and what both would consist of most chiefly, and that neither serves as handmaid to the other but each holds onto its own realm without any conflict with the other, and, finally, for also having shown, where occasion was given, the absurdities, disadvantages, and harm which have followed from human beings' having confused these two faculties with each other in amazing modes and from not knowing how to distinguish between them accurately or to separate the one from the other.

65 [44] Now before I go on to other things, I want to admonish here expressly[42] (although it has already been said)[43] about the utility and necessity of Sacred Scripture or revelation, because I state that it is very great.

66 For inasmuch as we cannot perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is the way of salvation,[44] but revelation alone would teach that it comes about on the basis of the special grace of God, which we cannot arrive at by reason, hence it follows that Scripture has brought very great solace to mortals.

67 [45] Of course, everyone absolutely can obey; and there are only a very few, compared with the whole human race, who acquire the habit of virtue from the

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[39] Cf. 14.2.1-4.

[40] See 15.1.34, with the previous note

[41] Or perhaps: avenged.

[42] "Cf. Annotation 30." Spinoza's note

[43] See 15 1.42, 50-55

[44] "Cf. Annotation 31 " Spinoza's note

# CHAPTER 16

## The Foundations of the Republic. The natural and civil right of each; and the Right of the Highest Powers

¶1 {189} So far, we have taken care to separate Philosophy from Theology and show the freedom of philosophizing which the latter grants to each.

2 Therefore, it is time for us to inquire how far this freedom to think, and for each to say what he thinks, extends in the best Republic.

3 So that we may examine this in order, while paying attention to the Republic and Religion, the foundations of the Republic are to be discussed—and first, the natural right of each.

¶2 [2] By the right and design of nature, I understand nothing else but the rules of the nature of each individual, in accordance with which we conceive each as° naturally determined for existing and operating in a certain mode.

2 For example, fish are by nature determined for swimming, and large ones for eating smaller ones; and so fish take possession of water, and large ones eat small ones, by the highest natural right.

3 [3] For it is certain that nature, considered absolutely, has the highest right to everything it can do; that is, the right of nature extends as far as its power[1] extends. For the power of nature is the very power of God, who has the highest right to everything. [4] But since the universal power of the whole of nature is nothing besides the power of all individuals together, hence it follows that each individual has the highest right to everything it can do, or that the right of each extends as far as its determinate power extends. And since the highest law of nature is that each thing endeavor, as much as is in it, to persevere in its state—and do so by taking no account of another but only of itself[2]—hence it follows that each individual has the highest right to this, that is (as I have said), existing and operating just as is determined naturally.

4 [5] Nor do we acknowledge any difference here between human beings and the remaining individuals of nature, nor between human beings endowed with reason and others who are ignorant of true reason, nor among the foolish, the obsessive, and the

[1] In Ch. 16-17 in particular, as elsewhere in the *Treatise*, "power" is sometimes *potentia* (as here in 16 2.3) and sometimes *potestas*. See note on "power" at P.5 14.

[2] The Latin for "account" (or "plan," as also in 16.3.2) is *ratio*, which also occurs as "reason" in 16.2.4, 6-7, and 3 1-5 4. Cf. Glossary, s.v "reason." Although Spinoza avoids this term in *Ethics*, Pt. IV, Prop. 25 ("No one endeavors to preserve his being because of [*causâ*] something else"), in Pt. I, Prop. 11, alt. dem., he repeatedly equates "cause" with "reason" (cf. White, 206, 48f.).

sane.

5 For whatever each {190} thing does on the basis of the laws of its nature, it does by the highest right, since, no doubt, it acts just as it has been determined to on the basis of nature, and cannot do otherwise.

6 [6] Therefore, among human beings, so long as they are considered to be living solely under the imperium of nature, one who does not yet recognize reason or does not yet have the habit of virtue lives with the highest right solely on the basis of the laws of the appetite, just like one who directs his life on the basis of the laws of reason.

7 That is, just as a wise man has the highest right to everything that reason dictates, or to live on the basis of the laws of reason, so too he who is ignorant and weak-spirited has the highest right to everything that the appetite urges, or to live on the basis of the laws of the appetite.

8 Yet this is the same as what Paul teaches in recognizing that there is no sin before there is law,[3] that is, so long as human beings are considered to be living on the basis of nature's imperium.

¶3 [7] The natural right of each human being is thus determined not by sound reason, but by longing and power.

2 For not everyone is naturally determined for operating in accordance with the rules and laws of reason; but on the contrary everyone is born ignorant of everything, and even if he has been well educated, a large part of his age has passed before he can acknowledge the true plan of living and acquire the habit of virtue; and meanwhile he is nevertheless bound to live and preserve himself so far as it is in him, namely, solely on the basis of the impulse of appetite, since nature gives him nothing else and denies him the actual power of living on the basis of sound reason; and on that account he is no more bound to live on the basis of the laws of a sound mind than is a cat on the basis of the laws of a leonine nature.

3 [8] Accordingly, whatever anyone who is considered solely under the imperium of nature judges useful to himself, whether by the guidance of sound reason or on the basis of an impulse of the emotions, he is permitted to seek and take for himself by the highest right of nature, whether by force or by a ruse or by prayers or by whatever mode he can ultimately do it more easily; and consequently he is permitted to consider as an enemy one who wants to impede him from fulfilling his spirit.

¶4 [9] From these things, it follows that the Right and Design of nature, under which everyone is born and for the most part lives, prohibits nothing except what no one longs for and what no one can do. It does not exclude quarrels, hatreds, anger, ruses, nor absolutely anything the appetite urges. [10] No wonder, for nature is not encompassed by the laws of human reason, which aim only at what is truly useful for human beings and at their preservation, {191} but by infinite other laws, which have to do with the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which a human being is a particle. Solely on the basis of its necessity are all individuals determined for existing and operating in a certain mode.

2 [11] Whatever seems to us ridiculous, absurd, or evil in nature comes from the

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[3] Rom. 5·13

fact that we know things only in part and are for the most part ignorant of the order and coherence of nature; and we want everything to be directed on the basis of the use of our reason, while yet what reason dictates as being evil is not evil with respect to the order and laws of nature as such, but only with respect to the laws of our nature alone.

¶5 [12] Be that as it may, no one can doubt how much more useful it is for human beings to live in accordance with laws and with the certain dictates of our reason—which, as we have said,[4] aim only at what is truly useful for human beings.

2 Besides, there is no one who does not long to live securely without dread, as far as can be done. Yet this can hardly happen so long as each is permitted to do everything at his discretion, and no more right is granted to reason than to hatred or anger. [13] For there is no one who does not live anxiously among enmities, hatreds, anger and ruses, and so who does not endeavor to avoid these as much as is in him.

3 For if we also consider that human beings necessarily live very miserably without mutual help and without the cultivation of reason, as we have shown in Chapter 5,[5] we will see very clearly that, for human beings to live securely and best, they have necessarily had to conspire as one and thereby put into effect that the right to everything which each had on the basis of nature they would have collectively, and it would no longer be determined on the basis of the force and appetite of each, but on the basis of the power and will of everyone together.

4 [14] Still, they would have attempted this in vain if they had wanted to follow only what the appetite urges (for each is pulled differently on the basis of the laws of the appetite); and so they have had to state and compact very firmly that they would direct everything solely on the basis of a dictate of reason (which no one dares conflict with openly, lest he seem to lack a mind), and would rein in the appetite insofar as it urges doing something to another's harm, and would not do to anyone what they do not want done to themselves, and, finally, would defend another's right as their own.

5 [15] By what plan this compact would have to be entered into so as to be operative and fixed, moreover, is to be seen here already.

6 For it is a universal law of human nature that no one neglects what he judges to be good, unless in hope of a greater **{192}** good or on the basis of dread of a greater harm. Nor would he prefer some evil, unless to avoid a greater one or in hope of a greater good. That is, each chooses whichever of two goods he judges to be greater and whichever of two evils seems to him lesser.

7 I say expressly that it seems greater or lesser to the one choosing, not that the matter is necessarily exactly as he judges.

8 [16] And yet this law is so *firmly* inscribed in human nature that it is to be posited among the eternal truths that no one can ignore.

9 Yet it follows from it necessarily that no one will promise without a ruse[6] to yield the right he has to all things, and absolutely no one will state promises unless on

[4] See 16.4.1

[5] See 5 2 2-5

[6] "Cf Annotation 32." Spinoza's note.

the basis of dread of a greater evil or in hope of a greater good.

10 [17] That this may be better understood, let it be posited that a Robber compels me to promise to give him my goods whenever he wanted.

11 Now since, as I have already shown,[7] my natural right is determined solely by my power, it is certain that if I can free myself from that Robber by a ruse, by promising him whatever he wanted, I am permitted to do so—by a ruse to make whatever compact he wanted—by the right of nature.

12 [18] Or let it be posited that I have without fraud promised someone not to taste food or any nourishment for the space of twenty days, and afterward I saw that I promised foolishly and cannot stand by the promise without very great harm. Since I am bound on the basis of natural right to choose the lesser of two evils, I can therefore by the highest right break faith with such a compact and make what has been said unsaid as it were.

13 [19] Yet I am permitted to do this, I say, by natural right, whether I see by a true and certain reason that I promised badly, or whether I seem to see it on the basis of my opinion. For whether I see it truly or falsely, I will fear a very great evil—and so, on the basis of nature's design, I will endeavor to avoid it in every mode.

14 [20] On the basis of these things, we conclude that no compact can have force unless by reason of utility: once this is removed, the compact is removed at the same time and remains inoperative.

15 Yet on that account, it is foolish for someone to demand another's faith in him forever, if at the same time he does not endeavor to put into effect that from the breaking of the compact being entered into, more harm than utility follows for the one who breaks it. This, indeed, has to have the greatest place in the Republic to be instituted.

16 [21] Yet if all human beings could be easily guided solely by the guidance of reason and acknowledge the highest utility and necessity of a Republic, there would be no one who would not completely detest a ruse. But everyone would altogether stand by his compacts in the highest faith, on the basis of a longing for this highest good—namely, preserving the Republic—and would above all keep faith, the highest bulwark of a Republic. **{193}** [22] But everyone is far from always being easily guided solely by the guidance of reason. For each is pulled by his own pleasure;[8] and the mind is very often so occupied by greed, glory, envy, anger, etc., that no place is left for reason. [23] On that account, although human beings make promises by certain signs of a sincere[9] spirit, and compact to keep faith, yet no one can be certain of another's faith unless something else goes along with the promise—since, by the right of nature, each can act with a ruse and no one is bound to stand by his compacts unless in hope of a greater good or in dread of a greater evil.

17 [24] But since we have already shown[10] that natural right is determined solely by the power of each, it follows that, as much of the power as each has which he transfers

[7] See 16 2.1-3.

[8] Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* II.65. Also, 16.5.4, 6.10.

[9] Lit : simple

[10] See 16.3 1-2.

to another, whether by force or spontaneously, he necessarily yields that much of his right to the other as well; and he who has the highest power[11]—by which he can compel all by force and restrain them by the dread of an overwhelming comeuppance, of which all are universally afraid—has the highest right over all. Indeed, he will retain that right so long as he preserves this power of executing whatever he wanted. Otherwise he will command precariously, and no one stronger will be bound to comply with him unless he wanted to.

¶6 [25] Accordingly, by this plan, without any conflict with natural right, a society can be formed and every compact always be kept in the highest faith—if, no doubt, each transfers all the power he has to society, which will thus retain the highest right of nature over everything, that is, the highest imperium, which everyone will be bound to obey, whether freely[12] or in dread of an overwhelming comeuppance.

2 [26] The right of such a society is called, in truth, a Democracy, which is thereby defined as an assembly as such of human beings which, collectively, has the highest right to everything it can do.

3 From this it follows that the highest power is bound by no law; but all have to obey it in everything. For all had to compact, tacitly or expressly, when they transferred to it all their power to defend themselves, that is, all their right.

4 [27] Of course, if they wanted something kept for themselves, they had at the same time to have taken the precaution of being able to defend it safely. Since they did not do so, however—and could not do so without the division and consequently the destruction of the imperium—by the same token they surrendered absolutely to the decision of the highest power. Since they did so absolutely and (as we have already shown)[13] with both necessity compelling **{194}** and reason itself urging, hence it follows that unless we wanted to be enemies of the imperium and act against reason, which urges us to defend the imperium with the utmost strength, we are bound to execute absolutely all the commands of the highest power, even if it commands the most absurd things. For reason also bids us execute such things, so that we may choose the lesser of two evils.

5 [28] Add that each was able to face this danger easily—of surrendering oneself to another's imperium and decision absolutely. For as we have shown,[14] this right to command whatever they wanted belongs to the highest powers as long as they really have the highest power. For if they lose it, they at the same time lose the right to command everything as well, and it falls to him or them who have acquired and can retain it.

6 [29] On that account, only rarely can it happen that the highest powers command very absurd things. For it is incumbent on them in the greatest degree to consult the common good and direct everything on the basis of the dictate of reason, so as to look out for themselves and retain the imperium. For as Seneca says, no one holds a

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[11] Here (alone) in 16.5.17, and also in its first occurrence (only) in 16.6.3, "power" is *potestas*, rather than *potentia*. Cf. notes on "power" at P.5 14 and 16.2.3.

[12] Lit · on the basis of a free spirit.

[13] See 16.5.1-17.

[14] See 16.5.17-6.1.

repressive imperium together for long.[15]

7 [30] It goes along with this that absurd things are less to be feared in a democratic imperium.

8 For agreeing to any° one absurd thing is almost impossible for the greater part of one assembly, if it is large—on account, furthermore, of its foundation and aim, which, as we have also shown,[16] is none other than to avoid the absurd things of the appetite and to confine human beings within the limits of reason, as far as can be done, so that they might live harmoniously and peacefully. If this foundation were to be removed, the whole fabric would easily collapse.

9 [31] It is therefore incumbent on the highest power alone to provide for these things, and on subjects, as we have said,[17] to execute its commands and not recognize any other right than what the highest power declares to be right.

10 [32] Yet perhaps someone will deem that, by this plan,[18] we make subjects into slaves, since they deem that one who acts on the basis of a command is a slave and one who gratifies his own spirit is free: this, however, is not absolutely true. For really, one who is pulled by his own pleasure and can neither see nor do what is useful for himself is a slave in the greatest degree; and he alone is free who lives with a full spirit solely on the basis of the guidance of reason.

11 [33] Action on the basis of a command—that is, obedience—does in some mode remove freedom; yet it does not thereby make one a slave, but the reason for the action does.

12 If the aim of the action is not the utility of the agent himself, but of the one commanding, then the agent is a slave and useless to himself. [34] Yet in a Republic and an imperium where the welfare of the whole populace, not of the one commanding **{195}**, is the highest law,[19] he who complies with the highest power in everything is not to be said to be a slave, useless to himself, but a subject. And therefore that Republic is most free whose laws are based on sound reason. For there each can be free[20] whenever he wanted, that is, live with a full spirit on the basis of the guidance of reason.

13 [35] So too, although children are bound to obey all the commands of parents, they are still not slaves. For the commands of parents mostly have to do with the utility of the children.

14 Therefore, we recognize the great difference between a slave, a child, and a subject; on that account, they are defined as follows. Namely, a slave is one who is bound to obey the commands of a master, which only have to do with the utility of the one commanding. A child, however, is one who does what is useful for himself on the basis of a parent's command. Finally, a subject is one who does what is useful for the community, and consequently also for himself, on the basis of the command of

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15 Seneca, *Troads* 258.

16 See 16 5.16-6 2

17 See 16.6.3-4

18 Or: reason. Cf. later in 16.6.10.

19 Cf. Cicero, *Laws* III.3 8

20 "Cf. Annotation 33." Spinoza's note

the highest power.

15 [36] Yet with these things, I deem that I have shown the foundations of a democratic imperium clearly enough. I have preferred to treat it first of all, since it seems the most natural and to go along most with the freedom that nature grants to each.

16 For in it no one transfers his natural right to another so that there is no consultation with him afterward, but to the greater part of the whole Society of which he makes up one part°.

17 Yet by this plan everyone remains equal, as before in the natural state.

18 [37] Furthermore, I have wanted to treat this imperium alone professedly, since it most contributes to[21] my intent in setting out to deal with the utility of freedom in a Republic.

19 Therefore, I pass over the foundations of the other powers; and for us to recognize their right, there is no need now to know where they have had, and often do have, their origin. For it is more than sufficiently established from what has just been shown.

20 [38] For whoever has the highest power—whether it be one, or a few, or, finally, everyone—it is certain that the highest right to command whatever he likes belongs to him. And furthermore, whoever transfers over to another the power to defend himself, whether spontaneously or compelled by force, has plainly yielded his natural right to him and consequently has decided to obey him absolutely in all things: this is bound to be altogether preferable, so long as the King or the Nobles or the Populace preserve the highest power that they have received, which has been the foundation for the transferring of right. Nor is there need to add more to this.

¶7 [39] The foundations and right of an imperium having been shown, it will be easy to determine **{196}** what private civil right is, what wrong is, and what justice and injustice are in the civil state; furthermore, who an ally is, who an enemy is, and, finally, what the crime of treason is.

2 [40] For by private civil right, we can understand nothing else but each's freedom to preserve himself in his state: this is determined by the edicts of the highest power and is defended solely by its authority.

3 For after each has transferred to another his right to live on the basis of his own preference, which was determined solely by his own power—that is, his freedom and power[22] to defend himself—he is now bound to live solely on the basis of the latter's plan and defend himself solely by his protection.

4 [41] Wrong is when a citizen or subject is compelled to suffer some harm from another, contrary to civil right or to an edict of the highest power. For wrong cannot be conceived except in the civil state. But no wrong can be done to subjects by the highest powers, who by right are permitted to do everything. Therefore, wrong can take place only among private individuals° who are bound by right not to hurt one another.

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[21] Lit · makes

[22] Since 16.6.4, the Latin for "power" has been *potestas*, but here it shifts momentarily to *potentia*, which has been the Latin from 16 2.3 through 16.6.1. In 16.7.4, it returns to *potestas*. Cf. note on "power" at 16.2.3.

5 [42] Justice is steadfastness of spirit in rendering to each what belongs to him on the basis of civil right. Injustice, however, is taking away from someone by a show of right what belongs to him on the basis of the true interpretation of the laws. Justice and injustice are also called equity and inequity, since those who are constituted to settle lawsuits are bound to have no regard[23] for persons,[24] but to consider everyone equal and defend each's right equally, and not envy the rich or despise the poor.

6 [43] Allies are human beings of two cities who contract between themselves not to hurt each other, so as not to come into danger by the risk of war or in view of some other utility, but on the contrary to assist each other when necessity compels, and to do so with each's retaining his imperium.

7 [44] This contract will be valid so long as its foundation, namely, the reason for the danger or for the utility, is in evidence. For no one contracts, or is bound to stand by his compacts, unless in the hope of some good or in the worry over some evil. If this foundation were to be removed, the compact is removed of itself: experience teaches this more than adequately as well.

8 [45] For although different imperiums contract between themselves not to hurt each other, they still endeavor to impede the other from becoming more powerful, and do not have faith in words unless they have an aim and utility transparent enough to both parties° to the contract. Otherwise they fear a ruse—and it is not wrong. For who but a fool who is ignorant of the right of the highest powers will acquiesce in the sayings and {**197**} promises of him who retains the highest power and the right to do whatever he wanted, and for whom the welfare and utility of his imperium has to be the highest law? [46] And if, besides, we pay attention to piety and religion, we will see moreover that no one who holds an imperium can without impropriety stand by his° promises to the harm of his imperium. For he cannot guarantee anything he has promised which he sees occasioning the harm of his imperium, unless by dissolving the faith given by his subjects—by which he is still bound in the greatest degree and which they usually promise very solemnly to keep also.

9 [47] Besides, an enemy is whoever lives outside the city so as not to recognize the imperium of the city, neither as an ally nor as a subject. For hatred does not make one an enemy of the imperium, but right does; and the right of a city against one who does not acknowledge its imperium by any kind of contracting is the same as against one who inflicts harm: whatever the reason, of course, it will be able by right to compel him either into capitulation or into an alliance.

10 [48] Finally, the crime of treason only takes place in subjects or citizens, who have transferred all their right to the city by a tacit or express compact; and that subject is said to have committed such a crime who has for any reason endeavored to seize the right of the highest power or transfer it to someone else.

11 [49] I say "has endeavored," for if he were not to be condemned until after the deed is committed—after the right is seized or transferred to another—it would frequently be too late for the city to endeavor to do so.

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[23] Elsewhere respect.

[24] I e , prejudice toward either party. Cf. Dt. 1:17.

12 I further say absolutely "who for any reason endeavors to seize the right of the highest power"—acknowledging no difference in whether harm or gain to the whole Republic would have followed from it as clearly as one could tell°.[25]

13 [50] For, whatever the reason he has endeavored it, he has committed treason and is by right condemned: indeed everyone confesses that in war this is done with the highest right. Namely, if someone does not keep his station, but attacks the enemy without the commander's knowledge, even though he has gone about the matter on good counsel—but on his own—and has overcome the enemy, still he is by right condemned for a capital crime°, since he has violated an oath and the right of the commander.

14 [51] Yet not everyone sees equally clearly that absolutely all citizens are always bound by this oath; still, the reason is exactly the same.

15 For since the Republic has to be preserved and directed solely by a council of the highest power and this right has been compacted absolutely to it alone, therefore if anyone has gone ahead to execute some public business solely by his own decision and unbeknownst to the supreme council,[26] **{198}** although the city's gain, as we have said,[27] would certainly follow from it, he has still violated the right of the highest power and has committed treason, and by right is deservedly condemned.

¶8 [52] It is now left for us, that we may put away all misgiving, to answer the question whether what we have affirmed above[28]—that anyone who does not have the use of reason lives on the basis of the laws of the appetite in the natural state by the highest right of nature—will openly conflict with revealed divine right; for, since everyone is bound absolutely equally (whether he has the use of reason or not) on the basis of a divine commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, therefore we cannot without wrong inflict harm on one another and live solely by the laws of the appetite.

2 [53] But we can easily answer this objection, if only we pay attention to the natural state. For it is prior to religion both by nature and in time.

3 For no one knows on the basis of nature[29] that he is bound by any obedience toward God; indeed he cannot attain this knowledge° by any reasoning,[30] but only on the basis of a revelation confirmed by signs can anyone have it.

4 [54] Therefore, before the revelation no one can be bound by a divine right that he cannot help being ignorant of.

5 And therefore the natural state is hardly to be confused with the state of religion, but is to be conceived as being without religion and law, and consequently without sin and wrong, as we have already done and as we have confirmed by the authority of Paul.[31]

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[25] Lit.: as clearly as possible.

[26] Reading *concilium* for *consilium*.

[27] See 16.7.12.

[28] See 16.2.6.

[29] "Cf. Annotation 34." Spinoza's note.

[30] Lit.: reason.

[31] See 16.2.1-8.

6 [55] Nor is it only by reason of ignorance that we conceive the natural state as being prior to revealed divine right and apart from it, but also by reason of the freedom in which everyone is born.

7 For if human beings are bound by divine right on the basis of nature, or if divine right is a right on the basis of nature, it is superfluous for God to enter into a contract with human beings and obligate them by a compact and oath.

8 [56] Therefore, it is to be absolutely granted that divine right began from the time when human beings promised to obey God in everything by an express compact, by which they yielded their natural freedom, as it were, and transferred their right to God, just as we have said is done in the civil state.[32]

9 But I will deal with these things more at length in the following.[33]

10 [57] True, it can be insisted at this point° that the highest powers—who, we have still said,[34] retain their natural right and are permitted by right to do anything to subjects—are equally as bound by this divine right as they are.

11 Therefore, to put away this full difficulty—which arises not so much on the basis of the pattern[35] of the natural state, as of that of natural° right—I say that in the natural state each is bound by revealed right for the same reason that he is bound to live on the basis of the dictate of sound reason. {199} Namely, since it is more useful to him and necessary for his welfare. If he did not want to do this, it is permitted at his own peril.

12 [58] Yet he is thus bound to live solely on the basis of his own decree and not on the basis of another's, and not to acknowledge any mortal judge or avenger of the right of religion.

13 Yet I affirm that the highest power has retained this right: it can indeed consult human beings, yet it is not bound to acknowledge anyone as judge, nor any mortal besides itself as avenger of any right, except a Prophet who has been expressly sent by God and who shows it by indubitable signs.

14 [59] Yet even then, it is not compelled to acknowledge a human being, but only God himself, as judge.

15 For if the highest power did not want to obey God in his revealed right, it is permitted at its own peril and harm—barring any conflicting civil or natural right. For civil right depends on its decree alone; [60] natural right, however, depends on the laws of nature, which have not been accommodated to Religion—which aims only at what is useful for human beings—but to the order of nature as such, that is, to God's eternal decree, which is unknown to us.

16 Others—who state that a human being can sin against God's revealed will but not against his eternal decree by which he has predetermined all things—seem to have conceived this more obscurely.

17 [61] If someone now asked, however, What if the highest power commanded something contrary to religion and to the obedience that we have promised God by

[32] See 16.6 1-20.

[33] See 17 4 1-5 9, 18 1 7, 19.1 13-16.

[34] See 16.6.3-4.

[35] Elsewhere: reason. Cf. later in 16.7.11.

an express compact?—is the human imperium to be complied with, or the divine?

18 But since I will deal with these things at more length in the following,[36] here I only say briefly that, when we have a certain and indubitable revelation, God is to be obeyed above all. [62] But since human beings usually err in the greatest degree about religion and in view of the diversity of their° mental casts fantasize many things with great contentiousness, as experience testifies more than enough, it is certain that if no one is bound to comply with the highest power in those things that he deems to pertain to religion, then the right of the city would depend on each's different judgment and emotion.

19 [63] For no one who judged a statute to be contrary to his own faith and superstition would then be bound by it; and so, under this pretext, each could assume a license for everything. And since for this reason the right of the city is completely violated, hence it follows that the highest right to make statutes[37] concerning religion, however it might judge this°, belongs to the highest power, on which alone it is incumbent to preserve the rights of the imperium and to protect divine as well as natural right; and all **{200}** are bound to comply with its decrees and commands concerning religion on the basis of the faith given to it, which God bids be altogether kept.

20 [64] But if those who hold the highest imperium are Heathens, either nothing is to be contracted with them, but it is to be resolved to suffer extremes rather than transfer their right to them; or, if they do contract and transfer their right to them, since by the same token they are deprived of defending themselves and the religion, they are bound to comply with them and keep faith or be compelled to do so, except for him whom God by a certain special revelation has promised help against a Tyrant or has wanted excepted by name.

21 [65] Thus we see, out of so many Jews who were in Babylon, only three youths, who did not doubt God's help, refused to comply with Nebuchadnezzar.[38] The rest, however—except for Daniel too, whom the King himself adored[39]—were no doubt compelled by right to comply, perhaps reflecting in their psyche that they were given over to the King by God's decree, and that the King obtained and preserved the highest imperium by divine direction.

22 [66] Eleazar, on the other hand, while the Fatherland was still standing such as it was, wanted to give an example of steadfastness to his men so that, following him, they would go through[40] anything rather than suffer their right and power to be transferred to the Greeks and would endure anything so as not to be compelled to swear faith to Heathens.[41] This is also confirmed by everyday experience.

23 [67] For, for their greater security, those who obtain a Christian imperium have no doubts about making treaties with Turks and Heathens, and bidding their subjects

[36] See 19.2.29-33.

[37] Elsewhere. to establish. The verb is akin to "statute," earlier in 16.8.19.

[38] See Dan. 3:12-18.

[39] See Dan. 2:46-49.

[40] Lit.: experience.

[41] See I Mac 6:43-46.

who go to dwell there not to assume more freedom to practice anything, human or divine, than they have expressly contracted for or than that imperium grants.

24 As is obvious from the contract of the Dutch with the Japanese, about which we have spoken above.[42]

[42] See 5 3.11.

# *CHAPTER 17*

## It is shown that no one can transfer everything to the Highest Power; nor is it necessary. How the Republic of the Hebrews was while Moses was alive; how it was after his death before they chose Kings, and its preëminence; and, finally, the causes of why the divine Republic could go under and could scarcely subsist without seditions

¶1 {**201**} Although the preceding Chapter's contemplation of the highest powers' right to everything, and of each's natural right being transferred to them, agrees in no small way° with practice, and practice can be set up[1] so as to approach it more and more, still it will never come about that it does not remain in many ways° merely theoretical.

2 [2] For no one will ever be able to transfer to another his power,[2] and consequently his right, so as to stop being a human being. Nor will any such highest power ever exist[3] which can execute everything as it wants. For in vain would it command a subject to hate one who has done him a favor, to love one who has borne him harm, not to be offended by insults, not to long to be freed from dread, and many other things in this mode which follow necessarily from the laws of human nature.

3 [3] Yet I figure experience itself teaches this very clearly. For never have human beings so yielded their right, and so transferred their power to another, as not to be feared by the very ones who received their right and power, and never has° an imperium not been endangered more on account of citizens, though deprived of their right, than on account of enemies. [4] And surely if human beings could be so deprived of their natural right as to be able to do nothing afterward[4] unless those who retained the supreme Right wanted, then in fact ruling very repressively over subjects would be permitted with impunity. This, I believe, cannot come into anyone's mind.

4 Therefore, it is to be granted to each to reserve for himself, of his own right,

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[1] Lit.: instituted. Likewise at 17.3.4.

[2] See notes on "power" at P.5.14 and 16.2.3.

[3] Lit.: be given.

[4] "Cf. Annotation 35." Spinoza's note.

many things that, on that account, depend on no one's decree but his alone.

5 [5] Still, so that it may be correctly understood how far the right and power of an imperium extends, it is to be noted that a imperium's power is comprised in {202} its being able to compel human beings not just by dread, but by absolutely everything by which it can make[5] human beings follow its commands. For compliance, not the reason for complying, makes one a subject.

6 [6] For, for whatever reason a human being resolves to execute the commands of the highest power—whether it is that he is afraid of punishment, or that he hopes for something from doing so, or that he loves the Fatherland or is driven by some other emotion—he still resolves on the basis of his own counsel and nevertheless acts on the basis of the imperium of the highest power.

7 [7] From the fact that a human being does something by his very own counsel,[6] therefore, it is not to be concluded that he acts on the basis of his own right and not the imperium's. For since he always acts on the basis of his very own counsel and decree, not only when obligated by love but also when compelled by dread to avoid an evil, either there would be no imperium and no right over subjects, or else it necessarily extends to everything by which human beings can be made to resolve to yield to it; and, consequently, whatever a subject does which answers to the highest power's commands—whether he is obligated to do it by love or compelled by dread or (what is more frequent) guided by hope and dread at the same time, or by reverence, which is a passion composed of dread and admiration, or for whatever reason—he acts on the basis of the imperium's right, not his own.

8 [8] This is also established as clearly as possible in that obedience does not have to do so much with outward action, as with the inward action of the psyche. And so, he is most under another's imperium who chooses with a full spirit to comply with another in all his commands; and it follows that one who rules over his subjects' minds holds the greatest imperium. For if those who are most feared held the greatest imperium, then indeed a Tyrant's subjects, who are most feared by their Tyrants, would hold the greatest imperium.

9 [9] Furthermore, although psyches cannot quite be commanded as tongues can,[7] yet psyches are in some proportion under the imperium of the highest power, which can in many modes make the greater part of human beings believe, love, hate, etc., whatever it wants.

10 [10] And so, although these things might not come about by the direct command of the highest power, still, as experience attests abundantly, they often come about on the basis of the authority of its power and at its direction, that is, on the basis of its right. Therefore, without any inconsistency,[8] we can conceive of human beings who, solely on the basis of the imperium's right, believe, love, hate, despise, and are carried away by absolutely any emotion whatever.

¶2 [11] {203} Yet although for this reason we have conceived the right and power of

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[5] Lit.: effect. Likewise at 17.1.7, 9.

[6] Lit.: his own proper counsel Likewise later in 17.1 7.

[7] Cf. Curtius, *History of Alexander* VIII.5 5

[8] Lit.: without any conflict of understanding

an imperium to be ample enough, still it will never come about that any be given which is so great that those who hold it have the power[9] for absolutely anything they want. I deem that I have already shown this clearly enough.

2 [12] By what plan an imperium could be formed so that nevertheless it would always be preserved securely, however, I have already said it is not my intent to show.[10] Still, to arrive at what I mean, I will note the things that divine revelation long ago taught Moses toward this end; and then let us ponder the Hebrews' histories[11] and successes: from these we will at last see what chiefly is to be granted to subjects by the highest powers for the imperium's greater security and enhancement.

¶3 [13] That an imperium's preservation depends chiefly on the faith of subjects and on their virtue and steadfastness of spirit in executing commands, reason and experience teach as clearly as possible. By what plan they have to be guided so as to keep faith and virtue steadfastly, however, it is not equally easy to see.

2 [14] For those who regulate, as well as those who are regulated, are all human beings—shying° away from labor, sliding into lust.[12]

3 Indeed, those who have but experienced the varied mental cast of the multitude almost despair over it, since it is not governed by reason but by emotions alone, is brusque toward everything, and is very easily corrupted by either greed or luxury. [15] Each deems that he alone knows everything, and wants everything to be modified on the basis of his own mental cast, and figures something is equitable or inequitable, a propriety or an impropriety, insofar as he judges it to fall to his profit or harm; out of glory, he despises his equals and will not suffer being regulated by them; out of envy for better praise or fortune, which is never equal, he longs for evil to another and delights in it. [16] There is no need to recount everything, since everyone of course knows what wickedness a disdain for the present and a longing to innovate matters, headstrong anger, and despicable poverty frequently induce in human beings, and how much these occupy and agitate their psyches.

4 To anticipate all these things, therefore, and to constitute an imperium so that no place is left for fraud—indeed, to set up everything so that everyone, whatever his mental cast, would put the public right ahead of private advantages—this is the task, this is the labor.[13]

5 [17] The necessity of the matter has indeed compelled human beings to devise many things; and yet it has never come about that an imperium is not endangered more on account of its citizens than on account of enemies **{204}** and that those who hold it are not more afraid of the former than of the latter.

6 [18] The Republic of the Romans, highly invincible to enemies, is witness: so often was it conquered and most miserably oppressed by its own citizens, and especially in the civil war of Vespasian against Vitellius. On this matter, see the beginning of

[9] Here the Latin is *potentia*, whereas earlier in 17.2.1 it is *potestas*. See notes on "power" at P.5.14 and 16.2.3.

[10] See 16.6.15-20.

[11] Or: stories.

[12] Cf. Terence, *Andria* 77-78.

[13] Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.129.

Tacitus' *Histories* IV,[14] where he depicts the most miserable face of the city.

7 [19] Alexander (as Curtius says at the end of Bk. VIII)[15] regarded reputation more simply in an enemy than in a citizen, since he believed his greatness could be destroyed by his own men, etc.

8 And fearing his fate, he prayed these words° to friends: *You just keep me secure from internal fraud and from ambushes at home; I will undergo the hazard of war and battle unfazed. Philip was safer on the field than in the theater; he often evaded the hand of enemies, but was not strong enough to escape his own men. If you mull over the departure of other Kings as well, you will enumerate more slain by their own than by the enemy* (see Q. Curtius IX.6).[16]

9 [20] Because of this, therefore—to keep themselves secure—Kings who had usurped the imperium long before, endeavored to persuade that they drew their descent from the immortal Gods.

10 No doubt it was since they deemed that, if only their subjects and everyone else° did not look on them as equals but believed them to be Gods, they would readily suffer being ruled by them and would easily give themselves to them.[17]

11 [21] Thus Augustus persuaded the Romans that he drew his origin from Aeneas, who was believed to be the son of Venus and among the Gods. He wanted to be worshiped with temples and a divine effigy, through flamens and priests (Tacitus, *Annals* I).[18]

12 [22] Alexander wanted to be hailed as Jove's son. This seemed to have been done on counsel, not out of pride, as his answer to Hermolaus' invective indicates: *That,* he said, *was almost worthy of laughter, for Hermolaus to demand of me that I turn away Jove, by whose oracle I am acknowledged. Is what the Gods answer also in my power? He has offered me the name of son. To accept*—note well—*was hardly alien to the matters we are dealing with. If only the Indians too believed me to be a God. For wars stand or fall*[19] *with reputation, and what is falsely believed has often taken on the role of truth* (Curtius, VIII.8).[20]

13 [23] In these few words°, he acutely proceeds to persuade the ignorant of the matter being dissembled and at the same time hints at the cause of the dissembling.

14 Cleo did this too, in his oration by which he endeavored to persuade the Macedonians to agree to Kings. For after he gave a show of truth to the dissembling by narrating with admiration the praises of Alexander and recounting his merits, he went on to the utility of the matter **{205}** as follows: *The Persians, not only piously but also prudently, worship their Kings among the Gods. For majesty is the guardian of the imperium's welfare.* And at last he concludes: *He himself, when the King entered the banquet, would prostrate his body on the ground. Others have to do the same—first*

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[14] Tacitus, *Histories* IV.1-4.

[15] Curtius, *History of Alexander* VIII 14.46.

[16] Curtius, *History of Alexander* IX.6.24-25.

[17] Cf Terence, *Andria* 62-63

[18] Tacitius, *Annals* I 10 6

[19] Elsewhere: are established by.

[20] Curtius, *History of Alexander* VIII.8.14-15.

*and foremost those endowed with wisdom* (see *idem* VIII.5).[21]

15 [24] But the Macedonians were more prudent; and unless they are completely barbaric, human beings do not suffer being duped so openly and becoming slaves, useless to themselves, on the basis of their being subjects.

16 Others, however, have been able to persuade them more easily that Majesty is sacred and plays the role of God on earth and is constituted by God, not by the vote and consent of human beings, and is preserved and defended by special providence and divine help.

17 [25] And in this mode Monarchs have devised many things for the security of their imperium: all of these I dismiss, and to arrive at what I mean, I will note and ponder, as I have said,[22] just what divine revelation long ago taught Moses to this end.

¶4 [26] We have already said above, in Chapter 5,[23] that after the Hebrews had gone out of Egypt they were no longer bound by the right of any other nation, but were permitted to constitute new rights at will and occupy the lands they wanted.

2 For after they had been freed from the intolerable oppression of the Egyptians and were not committed to any compact of mortals, they again acquired their natural right to everything they could do, and each could resolve anew whether he wanted to retain or, in truth, yield and transfer it to another.

3 [27] Therefore, constituted in this natural state, they resolved on the basis of the counsel of Moses—in whom everyone had the greatest faith—to transfer their right to no mortal but only to God; and not long afterward they promised equally, in one shout, to comply with God absolutely in all his commands and not to acknowledge any other right unless he stated by a Prophetic revelation that it was a right.[24]

4 [28] Yet this promise, or transfer of right to God, was made in the same mode as we conceived it above[25] to have come about in common society, when human beings resolve to yield their natural right.

5 For by an express compact and oath (see Ex. 24:7), they yielded their natural right freely, not compelled by force or frightened by threats, and transferred it to God.

6 [29] Furthermore, for the compact to be operative and fixed and without any suspicion of fraud, God compacted nothing with them until after they had experienced his wondrous power, by which alone they had been preserved and **{206}** by which alone they could be preserved in future (see Ex. 19:4-5).

7 For by this very fact that they believed they could be preserved by God's power alone, they transferred to God all their natural power to preserve themselves—which previously they had perhaps deemed they had from themselves—and consequently all their right.

8 [30] God alone therefore held the imperium of the Hebrews, which was then called, solely by force of the compact, the Kingdom of God; and God by right was

[21] Curtius, *History of Alexander* VIII.5.11-12.
[22] See 17 2.2.
[23] See 5.3.2
[24] Ex. 19:8, 24:3,7.
[25] See 16.6.1-7.20.

also called King of the Hebrews. And consequently the enemies of this imperium were the enemies of God,[26] and citizens who wanted to usurp it were guilty of treason to the divine Majesty;[27] and, finally, the rights of the imperium were the rights and commands of God.

9 [31] In this imperium, therefore, civil right and Religion—which, as we have shown,[28] consists solely in obedience toward God—were one and the same.

10 Viz., the dogmas of Religion were not lessons, but rights and commands; piety was regarded as justice, and impiety a crime and injustice. One who abandoned the Religion ceased to be a citizen and was by that fact alone considered an enemy; and one who died for the Religion was reputed to have died for the Fatherland; and, in short, there was absolutely no distinction between civil right and Religion.

11 [32] And because of this, this imperium could be called a Theocracy[29] since its citizens were not bound by any right unless revealed by God.

12 Be that as it may, all these things were established more in opinion than in reality.

13 For the Hebrews really retained the right of the imperium absolutely, as will be established on the basis of what has already been said: namely, on the basis of the mode and plan by which this imperium was administered and which I have set out to explain here.

¶5 [33] Inasmuch as the Hebrews did not transfer their right to anyone else, but everyone yielded his right equally, as in a Democracy, and shouted with one mouth, *Whatever God will speak* (no mediator being expressed), *we will do*,[30] hence it follows that everyone by this compact remained quite equal, and the right to consult God and to receive and interpret the laws was equal for everyone, and everyone held all the administration of the imperium absolutely equally.

2 [34] Because of this, therefore, everyone approached God equally in the first instance, to hear what he wanted to command; but at this first meeting they were so terrified, and on hearing God speak were so thunderstruck, as to deem that their last moment had arrived. [35] Full of dread, therefore, they approached Moses anew as follows: *Behold, we have heard God speaking in the fire, and there is no cause why we would want to die. Certainly this immense fire will devour us. If the voice of God is to be heard by us again, we will certainly die. You, therefore, go and hear everything said by our God, and you*—not {207} God—*will speak to us. Everything that God speaks to you, we will obey, and we will execute it.*

3 [36] By these words°, they clearly abolished the first compact and transferred their right to consult God and interpret his edicts to Moses absolutely. For here they promised to obey not, as before, everything that God spoke to them, but that God

[26] Cf. Ex. 23 22

[27] Lit : guilty of a breach of the divine Majesty. The Latin term ordinarily translated "treason" means, literally, "breach of majesty "

[28] See 14 1.7, with 13 1.9.

[29] Cf Josephus, *Against Apion* II.165

[30] Ex 19:8 (not italicized in Spinoza's Latin—perhaps inadvertently).

spoke to Moses (see Dt. 5 after the Decalogue[31] and 18:15-16).

4 [37] Moses, therefore, remained the giver[32] and interpreter of the divine laws, and consequently also the supreme Judge, whom no one could judge and who alone among the Hebrews had the role of God—that is, the supreme majesty—inasmuch as he alone had the right to consult God and give the divine answers to the populace and compel them to execute them.

5 He alone, I say; for if someone wanted to preach anything in God's name while Moses was alive, even though he were a true Prophet, he was still guilty of being a usurper of the supreme right (see Num. 11:28);[33] [38] and here it is to be noted that, although the populace chose Moses, they still could not by right choose a successor in Moses' place. For at the same time as they transferred to Moses their right to consult God and absolutely promised to consider him in the place of a divine oracle, they plainly lost every right and had to admit the successor whom Moses chose as chosen by God.

6 [39] For if he had chosen someone who, like himself, would have the whole administration of the imperium—namely, the right to consult God alone in his tent [34] and, consequently, to institute and repeal the authority of the laws, to decree war and peace, to send ambassadors, to constitute judges, to choose a successor, and to administer absolutely all the duties of the highest power—the imperium would have been merely monarchic, and there would not be any difference except that commonly a monarchic imperium would be regulated, or would have to be regulated, by a certain plan on the basis of a decree of God's hidden even from the Monarch himself, whereas the Hebrews' was by a decree of God's revealed to the Monarch only.

7 [40] This difference does not lessen the Monarch's dominion and right over everyone, but on the contrary enlarges it.

8 Otherwise, as for the populace of either imperium, both equally are subjects and are ignorant of the divine decree. For both depend on the mouth of the Monarch and understand what propriety or impropriety is from him alone; and really the populace are no less subject to the Monarch for their believing that he cannot command anything unless by a decree of God which has been revealed to him, but on the contrary they are more so.

9 [41] Yet Moses chose no such successor, **{208}** but left the imperium to be so administered by successors that it could not be called popular or aristocratic or monarchic, but Theocratic.

10 For the right to interpret the laws and communicate God's answers was in the possession of one individual°, and the right and power to administer the imperium in accordance with laws already explicated and answers already communicated was in the possession of another.

11 On this matter, see Numbers 27:21.[35]

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[31] Dt. 5:4-27 *passim.*

[32] Lit.: bearer. See note to 8.1.47.

[33] "Cf. Annotation 36 " Spinoza's note.

[34] Cf. Ex. 25:22, with 1.7.1-3.

[35] "Cf. Annotation 37." Spinoza's note

12 [42] And for these things to be better understood, I will expound the administration of the whole imperium in order.

13 First, the populace were bidden to build a house that would be, as it were, the palace of God, that is, of the supreme Majesty of that imperium.[36]

14 Yet this was not to be built at one individual's° expense, but at the whole populace's, as the house where God could be consulted was part° of the common right.

15 [43] The courtiers and administrators of this divine residence were chosen from the Levites.[37] Chosen supreme over these, and as it were second to God the King, was Aaron, Moses' brother, in whose place his sons succeeded legitimately.[38]

16 As next to God, he was therefore the highest interpreter of the divine laws, and the one who gave the populace the answers of the divine oracle and who, finally, supplicated God on behalf of the populace.

17 [44] For if, with these things, he had had the right to command the answers, nothing kept him from being an absolute monarch; but he was deprived of that, and absolutely the whole tribe of Levi was so bereft of the common imperium that they did not have any part that they owned as did the rest of the tribes, whereby they could somehow live. But he[39] instituted that they be fed by the rest of the populace, yet so that they would always be considered in the greatest honor by the common plebs, as the only tribe dedicated to God.[40]

18 [45] Furthermore, a militia having been formed out of the rest of the twelve tribes,[41] they were bidden to invade the imperium of the Canaanites and divide it into twelve parts and distribute it by lot.[42]

19 For this service, twelve princes were chosen, one out of each tribe, to whom, together with Joshua and the high pontiff Eleazar, the right was given to divide the lands into twelve equal parts and distribute it by lot.

20 [46] Joshua, moreover, was chosen to be the militia's commander-in-chief[43] he alone had the right to consult God in emergencies, yet not as Moses did, alone in his tent or in the tabernacle, but through the high Pontiff, to whom alone were given God's answers; furthermore, he had the right° to state God's commands as communicated through the pontiff and compel the populace to do them, to devise the means of executing and adhering to them, to choose from the militia however many and whomever he wanted, and to send ambassadors {209} in his own name; and absolutely all right of war depended on his decree alone. [47] In his place, however, no one legitimately succeeded, nor was chosen by anyone unless immediately by God and when necessity compelled the populace as such. Otherwise everything in war and

[36] Ex. 25-31, 35-40
[37] Num. 3.5-8 , Dt. 18:1-8.
[38] Ex 28:1, 30, with Num. 27:21.
[39] I.e., Moses.
[40] Num. 18:21, Dt. 10:9, Josh. 13:14.
[41] Num. 1:1-3, 20-49.
[42] Num. 34:1-29.
[43] Num. 27:18-21.

peace was administered by the princes of the Tribes, as I will soon show.[44]

21 [48] Finally, he bade everyone from the ages of twenty to sixty to take up arms for waging war and to form armies out of the populace alone, who swore to faith not in the commander or the high pontiff, but in the Religion or God.[45] So they were called the armies, or ranks,[46] of God; and, on the other hand, God among the Hebrews was called the God of armies;[47] and because of this in great battles, on whose outcome the victory or defeat of the whole populace depended, the ark of the covenant went in the midst of the army,[48] so that the populace, seeing their King as it were present, would fight with the utmost strength.

22 [49] From these commands by Moses to his successors, we easily gather that he chose administrators, not overlords, for the imperium.

23 For he gave no one the right to consult God by himself or whenever he wanted; and consequently he gave no one the authority that he himself had—to establish or repeal laws, to decree war and peace, to choose administrators of the temple as well as of the cities. These are all duties of one who holds the highest imperium. [50] For the high pontiff did have the right to interpret the laws and give God's answers, yet not, like Moses, whenever he wanted, but only when asked by the commander or the highest council or the like. And, on the other hand, the commander-in-chief of the army, and the councils, could consult God when they wanted, yet they could not receive God's answers except from the high pontiff. Therefore, God's sayings in the mouth of the pontiff were not decrees, as in the mouth of Moses, but only answers. When received by Joshua and the councils, however, then they did have the force of command and decree.

24 [51] Furthermore, this high pontiff who received God's answers from God did not have a militia and did not by right possess an imperium. And on the other hand, those who by right owned lands could not by right state[49] the laws.

25 The high pontiff, whether Aaron or his son Eleazar, had furthermore been chosen by Moses, whereas when Moses died, no one had the right to choose the pontiff; but son succeeded father legitimately.[50]

26 [52] The commander of the army had also been chosen by Moses, and he assumed the role of commander not by the right of the high pontiff, but when Moses' right was given to him. {210} And therefore, when Joshua died, the pontiff chose no one in his place and the princes did not consult God about a new commander, but each tribe retained Joshua's right to a militia of its own, and all the tribes together to a militia as such; [53] and there does not seem to have been a need for a commander-in-chief except when they had to fight with joint forces against a common enemy. This took place mostly at the time of Joshua, when not every tribe had a fixed place yet and

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[44] See 17.4.26-31

[45] Cf. Dt. 20:1-4.

[46] Lit.: orders.

[47] Or: hosts. See note on צבאות at 1.20.18.

[48] Josh. 3:6, I Sam 4:3.

[49] Cf. 17 5 20, 23.

[50] Ex. 28.41, Num. 25:13.

everything was part° of the common right.[51] But after all the tribes divided among themselves the lands possessed by right of war and everything was no longer everyone's any more, by the same token the reason for the common commander ceased, since, by that division, the different tribes had to be reckoned not as fellow citizens so much as allies. [54] With respect to God and the Religion, they had to be regarded as fellow citizens. But with respect to the right that one tribe had over another, they were nothing but allies—in almost the same mode (if you take away the common temple) as the Sovereign Confederate[52] Orders of the Netherlands. For the division of a commonwealth into parts is nothing else but that each now owns his part alone and the rest yield the right they had over that part.

27 [55] Because of this, Moses therefore chose princes for the tribes,[53] so that after the imperium was divided each would have care of his own part, namely, by consulting God through the high pontiff about the affairs of his tribe, by commanding his militia, by founding and fortifying cities, by constituting judges in each city, by invading the enemy of his specific imperium, and by administering absolutely every matter of war and peace.

28 Nor was the prince bound to recognize any other judge besides God[54] or one whom God expressly sent as a prophet. Otherwise, if the prince abandoned God, the rest of the tribes did not have to judge him as a subject, but to invade him as an enemy who had dissolved faith in a contract.

29 [56] We have examples of these things in Scripture.

30 For when Joshua died, the children of Israel—not a new commander-in-chief—consulted God. As it was understood that the tribe of Judah had to invade its enemy first of all, moreover, it contracted alone with Simeon to invade the enemy of both with joint forces: the rest of the tribes were not included in this contract (see Jud. 1:1-3), but each waged war separately against its own enemy (as is narrated in the aforementioned chapter)[55] and accepted whomever it liked **{211}** into its jurisdiction[56] and faith, even though it was in the commandments not to spare anyone under any condition of a compact, but to exterminate everyone.[57] They were indeed reprimanded on account of that sin, though they were not called into judgment by anyone.[58]

31 It was not on that account that they began to incite wars against one another and mix in one another's affairs; [57] on the contrary, they invaded the Benjaminites as enemies for having offended the rest and having so dissolved the bond of peace that none of the allies could lodge securely among them; and, victorious at last after fighting a third battle, by the right of war they butchered everyone, perpetrators and

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[51] Josh. 13:6-7

[52] Or Allied. (Cf. twice earlier in 17.5 26 )

[53] Num 34:16-19

[54] "Cf. Annotation 38." Spinoza's note.

[55] Jud. 1:4-36.

[56] Here the Latin is *ditio*. See Index of Terms, s.v. "right."

[57] Dt. 20:16-18.

[58] Jud 2 1-5.

innocents equally: afterward they lamented this in a belated penitence.[59]

¶6 [58] By these examples, what we have just said about the right of each tribe is plainly confirmed.

2 Yet perhaps someone will ask: Who chose the successor of the prince of each tribe? But about this matter I cannot gather anything certain on the basis of Scripture itself. Still, I conjecture this: inasmuch as each tribe had been divided into families whose heads were chosen from the family's elders, whoever was the eldest among these succeeded by right to the place of the prince. [59] For from the Elders Moses chose seventy helpers, who with him formed a supreme council.[60] Those who had the administration of the imperium after the death of Joshua are called "old" in Scripture;[61] and, finally, nothing is more frequent among the Hebrews than to understand by the old, judges: I figure this is recognized by everyone.

3 [60] But it is of little relevance to our point whether we know this for certain. It is enough for me to have shown that no one after the death of Moses had all the duties of the commander-in-chief. For inasmuch as everything did not depend on one man's or one council's or the populace's decree, but some things were administered by the one tribe, other things by the rest—by an equal right either way°—it follows very plainly that after the passing of Moses the imperium remained neither monarchic nor aristocratic nor popular, but, as we have said, Theocratic: first, since the royal home of the imperium was the temple, and solely by reason of it were all the tribes fellow citizens, as we have shown;[62] second, since all citizens had to swear to faith in God, their supreme judge, whom alone they promised to obey absolutely in all things.

4 And, finally, since the commander-in-chief over all, when there was a need for him, was chosen by no one but God alone.

5 [61] Moses expressly predicted this to the populace in God's name at Deuteronomy 18:15; and the choosing of Gideon, {212} Samson, and Samuel is attested to by the matter itself.[63] Therefore, it is not to be doubted that the rest of the faithful leaders were also chosen in the same mode, though it might not be established from the history[64] of them.

¶7 [62] These things being posited, it is time for us to see how far this plan for constituting the imperium could moderate spirits and contain those who were regulating, as well as those who were being regulated, so that the latter did not become rebellious and the former did not become Tyrants.

¶8 [63] Those who administer an imperium or who hold it are always eager to cover whatever wrong they commit with a show of right and persuade the populace that it was done by them honorably: this they even accomplish easily, since the whole interpretation of right depends on them alone.

2 For there is no doubt that, by the same token, they take the greatest freedom

[59] Jud. 19-21.

[60] Num 11:16-17, 24 Cf. Ex. 18:13-26, 24:1.

[61] Josh. 23:2, 24:1, 31

[62] See 17 5.13-18

[63] Jud 6 12-40 (Gideon); 13:3-25, 14 19, 15:18-19, 16:28-30 (Samson); I Sam 3:1-4 (Samuel)

[64] Or: story.

toward everything they want and that their appetite urges; and, on the other hand, much of their freedom would be taken away if the right to interpret the laws resided in another and if at the same time the true interpretation of the laws were so obvious to everyone that no one could doubt it.

3 [64] From this it becomes manifest that, with the princes of the Hebrews, a great cause of wrongs was removed by the fact that all the right to interpret the laws had been given to the Levites (see Dt. 21:5), who had no administration nor part of the imperium with the others[65] and whose whole fortune and honor depended on the true interpretation of the laws.

4 Furthermore, the populace as such were bidden to congregate every seven years in a certain place where they were taught the laws by the Pontiff; and, besides, each would read and reread the book of the law by himself continually and with the utmost attention (see Dt. 31:9ff. and 6:7).

5 [65] The Princes therefore had to take the greatest care, in their own cause at least, to administer everything in accordance with laws prescribed and sufficiently transparent to all, if they wanted to be treated[66] with the greatest honor by the populace, who would then venerate them as ministers of God's imperium and acting in the role of God. Otherwise they could not escape their subjects' greatest hatred, such as Theological hatred usually is.

6 [66] Along with these things—namely, with compelling the princes to rein in their lust—went something else of very great importance: viz., a militia was formed out of all the citizens (no one from twenty to sixty years of age excepted),[67] and the princes could not hire any outside militia with money.[68]

7 [67] This, I say, was of very great {213} importance. For it is certain that Princes can oppress a populace solely by a militia to whom they pay wages.

8 Furthermore, they fear nothing more than the freedom of a militia of fellow citizens by whose virtue, labor, and great loss of their blood, the freedom and glory of the imperium is acquired.

9 [68] Therefore, when Alexander had to fight against Darius a second time°, on hearing Parmenion's counsel he did not scold the one who gave the counsel, but Polypercon, who was standing with him.

10 For as Curtius says at IV.13,[69] having recently chided Parmenion more sharply than he wanted, he was not up to chastising him again; and he could not suppress the Macedonians' freedom, of which he was very much afraid, as we have already said,[70] until after he enlarged the number of soldiers recruited from the captives far above that of the Macedonians. For then he could gratify his impotent spirit, which had long been controlled by the freedom of the best citizens.

11 [69] If this freedom of fellow citizen soldiers restrains the princes of a human

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[65] Cf Num. 18:6-32, 35:1-8.

[66] See Glossary, s.v "worship."

[67] Num. 1:3.

[68] Cf. Dt. 17:14-17

[69] Curtius, *History of Alexander* IV.13.7-10.

[70] See 17 3 7-9.

imperium, who are used to usurping all the praise of victory for themselves, it had to have controlled the Hebrews' princes much more: their soldiers were not fighting for the Prince's glory, but for God's, and committed to battle solely on receiving God's answer.

¶9 [70] Along with it, furthermore, went the fact that all the Princes of the Hebrews were associated by the bond of religion alone. Therefore, if one of them abandoned it and began to violate the divine right of any of the Princes, he could be considered an enemy by the rest, and by right be suppressed.

¶10 [71] Along with it, in the third place, went the fear of some new Prophet. For provided that someone of approved life showed by some accepted signs that he was a Prophet, he had by the same token the highest right to command, namely, just as Moses had—in the name of God as° revealed to him alone and not just as consulted through the pontiff, as the princes had. [72] And there is no doubt that such men could easily pull an oppressed populace to themselves, and by superficial signs persuade them of whatever they wanted—since on the contrary, if things were correctly administered, the prince could in time provide for the Prophet to have to stand in his judgement beforehand, to be examined by him concerning whether he was of approved life, whether he had certain and indubitable signs of his mission, and, finally, whether what he wanted to say in God's name agreed with the accepted teaching and with the common laws of the fatherland. For if the signs did not sufficiently correspond or if the teaching were new, he could by right condemn him to death;[71] **{214}** otherwise he would be accepted solely on the authority and attestation of the prince.

¶11 [73] Along with it, in the fourth place, went the fact that the Prince did not exceed the rest in nobility or in the right of bloodline; but the administration of the imperium belonged to him only by reason of age and virtue.

¶12 [74] Along with it, finally, went the fact that the Princes and the entire militia could not be bound by the desire for war any more than for peace.

2 For the militia, as we have said,[72] consisted solely of citizens. Therefore, matters of both war and peace were administered by the same human beings.

3 One who in camp was a soldier, therefore, in the marketplace was a citizen; and one who in camp was a general, in court was a judge; and, finally, one who in camp was a commander, in the city was a prince.

4 [75] Therefore, no one could desire war for the sake of war, but for the sake of peace and to protect freedom; and perhaps a Prince abstained from new undertakings as much as he could, so as not to be bound to approach the high Pontiff and to stand before him with loss of dignity.[73]

5 So much for the reasons that contained the Princes within their limits.

6 [76] Now it is to be seen by what plan the populace were restrained. But the foundations of the imperium also indicate this very clearly. For if someone wanted to pay attention to them even superficially, he will see at once that they had to have prepared a love so special in citizens' spirits that no one could induce anything into

[71] Dt. 13:6.

[72] See 17.8.6-11, above.

[73] Or: entitlement.

their mind with more difficulty than betraying the fatherland or abandoning it. But on the contrary, everyone had to have been so affected as to suffer any° extremes[74] rather than a foreign imperium.

7 [77] For after they transferred their right to God and believed that their kingdom was God's kingdom and that they alone were the children of God, the other nations being God's enemies, against whom moreover they were moved by the most antagonistic hatred (for they also believed this to be pious; see Ps. 139:21-22), they could abhor nothing more than swearing to faith in some outsider and promising obedience to him. Nor could a greater shame, or anything more execrable, be devised among them than betraying the fatherland, that is, the very kingdom of the God whom they prayed to. [78] Indeed, going anywhere outside the fatherland to dwell was considered as a humiliation only since the worship of God, by which they were always bound, was not permitted to be exercised except inside the fatherland itself, inasmuch as this land alone was considered sacred, the others being unclean and profane.

8 [79] Therefore, when David was compelled to go into exile, he complained before Saul,[75] *If those who instigate you against me* **{215}** *are human beings, they are cursèd, since they exclude me from walking in God's inheritance; but they say, Go and worship alien Gods.*

9 And because of this as well—what is to be noted here first and foremost—no citizen was condemned to be exiled. For those who sin are entitled to a comeuppance, not a humiliation.

10 [80] The love of the Hebrews toward the fatherland was therefore not a simple love, but a piety that, together with their hatred against the other nations, was so fostered and nourished in the daily worship that it had to have turned into their nature. For the daily worship was not only altogether different (by which it came about that they were altogether special and completely separated from the rest of the nations), but also absolutely contrary to theirs°.

11 [81] Therefore, on the basis of that sort of daily faultfinding an ongoing hatred had to have arisen—nothing could inhere more firmly in their spirits than this, inasmuch as it was a hatred that arose on the basis of great piety or devotion and one that was believed to be pious: surely none greater than it or more tenacious can be given. And there was no lack of common cause for the hatred's being more and more enflamed, namely, its reciprocation. For nations had to have held them in the most antagonistic hatred in return.

12 [82] How much all these things, however—viz., the freedom of the human imperium, devotion toward the fatherland, an absolute right against everyone else and a hatred not only permitted but also pious, singularity[76] of mores and rites—how much, I say, these things availed to firm up the Hebrews' spirits for tolerating all things with a special steadfastness and virtue on behalf of the Fatherland, reason teaches as clearly as possible and experience itself has attested.

13 For never while their city was standing could they be under another's imperium

[74] Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* I.219.

[75] I Sam. 26:19.

[76] The noun *singularitas* is cognate with the adjective translated "special" 17 12.10, 12 Cf note on "showy" at P.3 1

for long; and so they called Jerusalem the rebellious city (see Ezra 4:12, 15).

14 [83] The second imperium (which was barely a shadow of the first, after the Pontiffs usurped the right of the principate as well) could be destroyed by the Romans with the greatest difficulty, as Tacitus himself attests in *Histories* II: *Vespasian had finished off the Jewish war with only the siege of Jerusalem remaining, a hard and arduous task, owing more to the mental cast of the populace and the persistence of superstition than to how much strength the besieged had left over for tolerating necessities.*[77]

15 [84] But besides these things, regard[78] for which depends solely on opinion, there was another special thing in this imperium—which is a very solid one—by which citizens had to have been restrained in the greatest degree from thinking of abandoning it and from being bound by any desire to desert the fatherland: no doubt it was the reason of utility, which is the grit and life of all human actions; **{216}** and this, I say, was special in this imperium. [85] For nowhere did citizens possess what was theirs with greater right than did the subjects of this imperium, who had a part of the lands and fields equal to the prince's; and each was owner[79] of his part forever. For if someone compelled by poverty had sold his farm or field, it had to be restored to him in full with the advent of the jubilee;[80] and other things were instituted in this mode so that no one could be alienated from his fixed[81] goods.[82]

16 [86] Furthermore, poverty could not have been more tolerable anywhere than where charity toward a neighbor, that is, toward a fellow citizen, had to be cultivated with the utmost piety so as to have God their King be propitious.

17 It could not therefore have gone[83] well for Hebrew citizens except in their fatherland, whereas outside it there would be very great harm and shame.

18 [87] Furthermore, these things were conducive first and foremost not only to retaining them solely inside the fatherland, but also to avoiding civil wars and taking away the causes of quarrels: namely, because no one was servant to his equal but only to God, and because charity and love toward a fellow citizen was regarded as the highest piety, which in no small way° fostered the common hatred in which they held the other nations and these in turn held them.

19 [88] Besides, conducive first and foremost was the utmost training in obedience, by which they were educated—because they had to do everything on the basis of the determinate prescription of the law. For they were not permitted to plow at their discretion, but in certain seasons[84] and years, and only with one kind of animal at the same time. So too, they were not permitted to sow and reap except by a certain plan and in a certain season; and, in short, their life was a continual cult of obedience (on

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[77] Tacitus, *Histories* II.4

[78] Elsewhere respect

[79] Elsewhere: lord. Cf Spinoza's note at 4.4.36n

[80] Lev. 25.8-17

[81] I.e., immovable.

[82] Lev 25·18-55

[83] Lit been.

[84] Or· times Likewise later in 17.12 19

this matter, see Ch. 5 about the use of Ceremonies).[85]

20 [89] Once they were altogether accustomed to it, therefore, it no longer had to seem slavery to them, but freedom. Hence it also had to follow that no one longed for what was denied, but for what was commanded.[86] It seems to have been in no small way° conducive to this that they were bound to give themselves to leisure and rejoicing[87] at certain seasons of the year, not so as to comply with their spirit, but with God on the basis of their spirit.

21 [90] Three times° in the year they celebrated God's festivals (see Dt. 16)[88]; on the seventh day of the week, they had to cease from all work and give themselves to leisure;[89] and other times besides these were designated when honorable acts of rejoicing and banquets were not only permitted, but commanded.[90] And I do not deem that anything more effective can be devised to influence the psyches[91] of human beings. For psyches are taken by no thing more than by the joy that arises on the basis of devotion, that is, on the basis of love and admiration **{217}** together.

22 [91] Nor could they easily be siezed with a disdain for routine[92] matters; for the worship appointed for the festival days was rare and varied.

23 Along with these things went the highest reverence for the temple, which they always kept very religiously on account of its special worship and on account of the matters they were bound to observe before anyone was permitted to go there, so that to this day they do not read without great horror of the scandal of Manasseh—that he undertook to put an idol in the temple itself.[93]

24 [92] Toward the laws as well, which were guarded very religiously in the inner sanctuary, the populace had no less reverence.

25 Therefore, the rumors and prejudices of the populace were not to be feared here in the least. For no one dared pass judgment on divine matters, but all had to comply with everything that was commanded them by the authority of the divine answers received in the temple, or of the law set down by God, without any consultation with reason.

26 Now with these things, I deem that I have expounded the overall plan of this imperium—though briefly, yet clearly enough.

27 [93] It is now left for us to inquire also into the causes of why it came about that the Hebrews abandoned their laws so often, and why the imperium could at last be altogether destroyed.

28 Yet perhaps someone will say here that it came about from the people's stubbornness.

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85 See 5 3 8-9.

86 Cf. Ovid, *Amores* III.4.17

87 Lit : joy. Likewise in 17 12 21.

88 Dt. 16:1-17.

89 Ex. 20.8-10, 35:1-3, Dt 5:12-14.

90 E g., Num. 28:11-15, 29:1-6, 35-38.

91 Or: spirits (as in 17 12.20) Likewise later in 17.12.21.

92 Lit usual

93 II Ki 21.7 and context

29 But this is childish. For why was this nation more stubborn than the others? Was it by nature? Surely nature does not create nations, but individuals, who are not divided into nations except on the basis of the diversity of language, laws, and accepted mores; [94] and only on the basis of these last two—laws and mores—can it arise that each nation has a special mental cast, a special condition, and, finally, special prejudices.

30 If, therefore, it is to be granted that the Hebrews were stubborn beyond other mortals, it has to be imputed to a vice of the laws or of the accepted mores.

31 [95] And surely this is true: if God had wanted their imperium to be more steadfast, he would also have set down rights and laws otherwise, and instituted another plan for administering it. Therefore, what else can we say except that they made God angry with them, not only, as Jeremiah 32:31 says, from the founding of the city, but already from the founding of the laws.

32 [96] Ezekiel 20:25 also attests to this, saying, *I have also given them statutes that were not good and rights they did not live by, so that I have defiled them through their gifts, by sending back every opening of the womb*—that is, the firstborn—*that I might destroy them, that they might know that I am Jehovah.*

33 For these words—and the cause of the sacking **{218}** of the imperium—to be correctly understood, it is to be noted that the first intent was to hand over the whole sacred service to the firstborn, not to the Levites (see Num. 8:17); [97] but after everyone except the Levites prayed to the calf,[94] the firstborn were repudiated and defiled, and the Levites chosen in their place (Dt. 10:8); this change, the more I consider it, compels me to break out in the words of Tacitus: God's cares at that time were not for their security, but for vengeance.[95]

34 Nor can I wonder enough that there was such anger in the heavenly spirit[96] as to have founded the laws themselves—which always aim solely at the honor, welfare and security of the populace as such—in the spirit of avenging itself and punishing the populace, so that the laws were seen as being not laws—that is, in° the populace's welfare—but rather punishments and comeuppances.

35 [98] For all the gifts that they were bound to give to the Levites and the priests—as well as the fact that they had to redeem the firstborn and give the Levites money per capita, and, finally, that it was granted to the Levites alone to handle sacred matters°—were continual evidence°[97] to them of their own defilement and repudiation.[98]

36 [99] The Levites, furthermore, were in the habit of reproving them continually. For there is no doubt that, among so many thousands, many annoying Theologizers were found. Hence for the populace there was a desire to observe the doings of the Levites—who without a doubt were human beings—and, as it came about, to accuse them all for the shortcoming of one.

37 Hence there were rumors continually, furthermore a disdain for feeding human

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94 Ex 32:1-29.

95 Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* I 3.

96 Cf Virgil, *Aeneid* I.11

97 More or less lit.: argued continually.

98 Cf Num 16:1-17:27

beings who were leisured and envied and unrelated to them by blood, especially if grain was costly.

38 [100] Why wonder, therefore, if in times of leisure, when manifest miracles ceased and no human beings of the most unquestioned authority appeared, the populace's spirit, irritated and greedy, began to languish and at last abandoned the worship—which, although divine, was still ignominious and even suspect to them—and longed for a new one; and that, to tie the populace to themselves and turn them away from the Pontiff, the Princes, who were making their way to obtaining the highest right of the imperium for themselves, granted them everything and introduced new cults?

39 [101] For if the Republic had been constituted on the basis of the first intention, right and honor would have been equal for all the tribes, and everything would have gone on very securely. For who would have wanted to violate the sacred right of his blood-relatives? Who would prefer anything else but to feed his blood-relatives—brothers and parents—on the basis of Religious piety?[99] Than to be taught by them the interpretation of the laws? And, {219} finally, than to await from them the divine answers?

40 [102] Furthermore, by this plan all the tribes would no doubt have remained far more closely united, if the right to administer sacred matters° were equal for all—though, indeed, there would be nothing to be afraid of if the very choice of the Levites had had a cause other than anger and vengeance.

41 But as we have said,[100] they made God angry at them, and he defiled their gifts—if I may repeat once more the words of Ezekiel's[101]—by sending back every opening of the womb so as to destroy them.

42 [103] Besides, these things are confirmed by the histories[102] themselves.

43 At the same time as the populace began to abound in leisure in the desert, many—and not men from the plebs—began to bear this choice poorly and took this occasion to believe that Moses was not instituting anything by divine command but at his discretion, since he chose his tribe above all and gave the right of the pontificate to his brother forever. On that account, they went to him in an excited tumult, shouting that everyone was equally holy and that he had raised himself above everyone contrary to right.[103]

44 [104] He could not calm them by any plan; but when a miracle was brought in as a sign of faith, all were extinguished.[104] Hence there arose a new and universal sedition of the whole populace, believing that they had been extinguished not by God as judge but by the art of Moses—who, worn out, calmed them at last after a great disaster or pestilence, yet so that everyone preferred dying to living.[105]

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[99] Lit the piety of the Religion.

[100] See 17 12.32.

[101] I e , Ezek 20:25

[102] Or: stories.

[103] Num. 16:1-15.

[104] Num. 16:16-17·5.

[105] Num. 17:6-28.

45 At that time, therefore, it was more that the sedition was over than that harmony had begun.[106]

46 [105] For so Scripture testifies at Deuteronomy 31:21, where, after God has predicted to Moses that the populace will abandon the divine worship after his death, he says these things to him: *For I have recognized their appetite and what they are contriving today—while I have not yet led them to the land that I have sworn.*

47 And a little later, Moses says to the populace themselves: *For I myself have recognized your rebellion and your stubbornness. If you have been rebellious against God while I have been living with you, you will be much more so after my death.*[107]

48 [106] And really, it happened just so, as is recognized.

49 Hence there were great changes and great license toward everything, luxury, and sloth, by which everything began to deteriorate until, being often subjugated, they plainly broke with the divine right and wanted a mortal king,[108] so that the seat of the imperium was not the Temple but the palace, and all the tribes no longer remained fellow citizens with respect to the divine right and the pontificate, but with respect to the Kings.

50 [107] Yet here was immense material for new seditions, on the basis of which the ruin of the whole imperium followed at long last.

51 For what else can Kings bear less than to rule precariously **{220}** and to suffer an imperium within the imperium?

52 The first ones, who were chosen from being private citizens°, were content with the level of entitlement to which they had climbed. [108] Yet after their sons possessed the kingdom by right of succession, they began to change everything little by little, so as to hold all the right of the imperium for themselves: this they were lacking, for the most part, so long as the right of the laws did not depend on them but on the Pontiff, who guarded the laws in the sanctuary and interpreted them to the populace.

53 And so they were bound to the law as subjects, and could not by right repeal them or set down[109] new ones with equal authority.

54 Furthermore, since the right of the Levites prohibited the Kings, who were equally profane as their subjects, from administering sacred matters°,[110] and furthermore since the whole security of their imperium depended solely on the will of one who was seen as a Prophet,[111] of which matter they had seen examples—of how much freedom Samuel no doubt commanded everything to Saul with, and how easily he could transfer the right to rule to David because of one offense[112]—therefore, they had an imperium within the imperium, and ruled precariously.

55 [109] To overcome these things, therefore, they granted the dedicating of other temples to other° Gods, so that there would be no more consultation with the Levites.

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[106] Cf. Tacitus. *Histories* IV.1.
[107] Dt 31:27
[108] I Sam. 8:4-22. Cf. I Sam. 10:17-27, 12:1-25, with Dt. 17:14-20
[109] Elsewhere: found. (See 17.5.27, 12.34.)
[110] Num 18:1-32.
[111] Dt 18:15-22.
[112] I Sam. 15:1-16:13

Furthermore, they sought out many to prophesy in the name of God, so as to have Prophets whom they opposed to the true ones.

56 [110] But whatever they endeavored, they could never fulfill their wish.

57 For the Prophets, prepared for anything, waited till the opportune time, namely, the imperium of a successor, which is always precarious while the memory of a predecessor is fresh. Then, on divine authority, they could easily bring in someone hostile to the King and renowned in virtue to avenge the divine right and possess the imperium, or a part of it, by right.

58 [111] But the Prophets could not accomplish anything by this plan. For even though they might take away a Tyrant from their midst, the causes yet remained. Therefore, they did nothing else but favor a new Tyrant, with much citizens' blood.

59 There was no end to the discords and civil wars, therefore; still, the causes of violating the divine right were always the same: these could not be taken from their midst either, except together with the whole imperium.

¶13 [112] With these things, we see how Religion had been introduced into the Hebrews' Republic, and for what reason the imperium could have been eternal if the lawgiver's just anger had let it persist the same.

2 But since that could not come about, it had to go under at last.

3 Yet here I have been speaking solely of the first imperium, [113] for the second one was scarcely a shadow of the first, since **{221}** they were bound by the jurisdiction of the Persians, whose subjects they were; and after they acquired freedom, the Pontiffs usurped the right of the principate, by which they obtained an absolute imperium.

4 Hence the Priests had an immense lust to rule and to acquire the pontificate at the same time; [114] therefore, there has hardly been a need to say more about this second one.

5 Whether, in truth, the first one, to the extent that we have conceived it to be durable, is imitable, or whether it would be pious to imitate it as much as could be done, will be obvious from the following Chapters°.[113]

6 [115] In lieu of a flowery conclusion[114] here, I would only want noted what we have already hinted at above:[115] namely, on the basis of what we have shown in this Chapter it is established that the divine right, or that of religion, arises from a compact, without which there is none but natural right°; and therefore, on the basis of the bidding of their religion the Hebrews were not bound by any piety toward peoples who did not enter the compact, but only vis-à-vis fellow citizens.

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[113] See Ch. 18-19.

[114] Lit : a flourish.

[115] See 17 4 1-13.

## *CHAPTER 18*

# From the Hebrews' Republic and histories,[1] some Political dogmas are concluded

¶1 Although the Hebrews' imperium, such as we have conceived it in the preceding Chapter, could have been eternal, still no one can imitate it now; nor is it even advisable.

2 For if some wanted to transfer their right to God, they would have to compact it expressly with God, just as the Hebrews did; and so it would require the will not only of those transferring the right but also of God, to whom it would be transferred.

3 [2] Yet on the other hand, God has revealed through the Apostles that God's compact is no longer written with ink and on stone tablets, but with God's Spirit on the heart.[2]

4 Furthermore, the form of such an imperium could perhaps be useful only for those who wanted to live alone to themselves, without outside commerce, and enclose themselves within their own limits and segregate themselves from the rest of the globe, and hardly for those for whom it is necessary to have commerce with others. On that account, the form of such a imperium can be of use only for the very few.

5 [3] Be that as it may, even though it is not imitable in all things, it still had many things very worthy of at least being noted, and which perhaps it would be very advisable to imitate.

6 And yet, as I have already admonished,[3] since my intention is not to treat of a Republic professedly, I will dismiss many of those things and note only what makes for {222} my goal.

7 Namely, it would not conflict with God's Kingdom to choose a highest majesty that would have the highest right of the imperium. [4] For after the Hebrews transferred their right to God, they handed over the highest right to command to Moses, who alone, therefore, had the authority to set down and repeal laws in God's name, to choose ministers of the sacred matters°, to judge, teach and chastise, and, finally, to command absolutely everything to everyone.

8 [5] Furthermore, although the ministers of the sacred matters° were the interpreters of the laws, still it was not for them to judge citizens or excommunicate anyone. For this belonged only to the judges and princes chosen from the populace (see Josh. 6:26, Jud. 21:18, and I Sam. 14:24).

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[1] Or: stories.

[2] See II Cor. 3:3

[3] See 16.6.15-20, 17 2.1-2.

9 [6] Besides these things, if we also wanted to pay attention to the Hebrews' successes and histories,[4] we would also find other things worthy of being noted.

10 Viz., first, there were no sects in the Religion until after the Pontiffs in the second imperium had the authority to decree and transact the business of the imperium: so that this authority might be eternal, they usurped the right of the principate for themselves and ultimately wanted to be called Kings.

11 [7] The reason is readily seen°. For in the first imperium, no decrees could be made in the name of the Pontiff, inasmuch as they had no right to decree, but only to give God's answers when asked by the princes or the councils. And on that account, they could then have no lust for making new decrees, but only for administering and defending the customary and accepted ones.

12 For there was no other plan by which they could safely preserve their freedom when the princes were unwilling, except by keeping the laws incorrupt.

13 [8] Yet after they also acquired the power to transact the business of the imperium, and the right of the principate alongside the pontificate, each began to seek the glory of his own name in the religion as well as in other things—by determining everything on pontifical authority and decreeing new things daily about the ceremonies, about the faith, and in everything they wanted to be no less sacred and of no less authority than the laws of Moses. [9] From this it came about that religion declined into deadly superstition,[5] and the true sense and interpretation of the laws was corrupted. It goes along with this also that, while the pontiffs were making their way to the principate at the beginning of the restoration, they catered to the plebs° in everything, so as to pull the plebs to them—by approving the plebs' doings, even if impious, and by accommodating Scripture **{223}** to their worst mores. [10] Malachi attests to this about them in very well-conceived words. For after he has scolded the priests of his time by calling them despisers of God's name, he goes on to chastise them as follows: *A pontiff's lips have custody of science and the law is sought out of his mouth, since he is God's emissary. But you have withdrawn from the way; you have made the law a stumbling-block to many. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the God of hosts.*[6] And so he goes on to accuse them further of interpreting the laws at their discretion and taking no account of God, but only of persons.

14 [11] Yet it is certain that the Pontiffs could never have done these things so cautiously as not to have been noticed by the more prudent, who, with the growing audacity, therefore contended that they did not have to be bound by any other laws than those that had been written. Otherwise, the decrees that the Pharisees (who, as Josephus says in his *Antiquities*,[7] consisted mostly of the common plebs) were deceived into calling the traditions of the fathers, were not to be kept in the least.

15 [12] However that may have been, we cannot doubt in any mode that the flattery of the Pontiffs, the corruption of the religion and of the laws, and the unbelievable enlargement of the latter gave rather great and frequent occasion for disputes and

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[4] Or: stories.

[5] Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* XV.44.5.

[6] Mal 2.7-8.

[7] Josephus, *Antiquities* XIII.288, 298, XVIII 15.

altercations, which could never be settled. For when human beings in the ardor of superstition begin to quarrel, with a magistrate helping on either side, they can never be calmed but are necessarily divided into sects.

¶2 [13] Second, it is worthy of being noted that the Prophets—being private men—by their freedom to admonish, scold and reprove, provoked rather than corrected human beings. Yet those who were admonished or chastised by the Kings were easily turned around.

2 Indeed, they were often intolerable even to pious Kings, on account of the authority they had to judge what was done piously or impiously, and even to chastise the Kings themselves if they continued to enact public or private business contrary to their judgment. [14] King Asa, who, from the attestation of Scripture, ruled piously, put the Prophet Hanani into prison (see II Chr. 16),[8] since he undertook to reprimand and criticize him freely on account of the compact made with the King of Aram. And other examples are found besides this which show that the religion received more detriment than enhancement from such freedom, not to mention that {224} here too, from the fact that the Prophets retained so much right for themselves, there arose great civil wars.

¶3 [15] Third, it is also worthy of being noted that, so long as the populace held the kingdom, they had only one civil war, which yet was absolutely extinguished; and the victors so pitied the vanquished that they took care to restore them in every mode to their earlier dignity and power.[9]

2 Yet after the populace—who were very little accustomed to kings—changed the first form of the imperium into a monarchy, there was almost no end to the civil wars; and they fought battles so atrocious as to surpass the infamy of all. [16] For in one battle,[10] five hundred thousand Israelites are slaughtered by the Judeans (which almost goes beyond belief).[11] And in another,[12] in contrast, the Israelites butcher many of the Judeans (the number is not handed down in Scripture), capture the King himself, nearly demolish the wall of Jerusalem and altogether pillage the Temple itself (that it might be noted that there was no measure[13] to the anger); and laden with the immense plunder of their brothers and satiated with blood, with hostages having been taken and the King left in his kingdom—by now almost sacked—they put down their arms, having been made secure not by faith but by the weakness of the Judeans.

3 [17] For after a few years, with the Judeans' forces restored, they engage in a new battle once more, in which the Israelites again come out victors, butcher a hundred and twenty thousand Judeans, lead up to two hundred thousand women and children captive, and again seize great plunder. And yet, consumed by these battles and others that are narrated in passing in the histories,[14] they ultimately were plunder to their

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[8] II Chr. 16:10

[9] Jud 20-21.

[10] II Chr. 13 17

[11] Lit.: faith

[12] II Chr. 25 21-24.

[13] Lit.: mode

[14] Or: stories.

enemies.[15]

4 [18] Furthermore, if we also wanted to compute the times in which they were permitted to enjoy absolute peace, we will find a great discrepancy. For before the kings, they often spent forty years harmoniously without external or internal war,[16] and once eighty years[17] (which exceeded every expectation).[18]

5 [19] Yet after the Kings acquired the imperium, since the struggle[19] was no longer for peace and freedom, as before, but for glory, we read that every King waged war except one, Solomon (whose virtue—being wisdom—could be established better in peace than in war). Along with this, furthermore, went the fatal lust for ruling, which often made the road to the kingdom quite bloody.

6 [20] Finally, during the populace's rule, the laws remained incorrupt and were steadfastly observed.

7 For before the kings there were very few Prophets who admonished the populace, {**225**} whereas after the choosing of Kings there were very many of them at the same time. For Obadiah freed a hundred from massacre and hid them lest they be killed with the others.[20]

8 Nor do we see that the populace were deceived by any false Prophets until after the imperium yielded to the kings, whom most men° are eager to cater to.

9 [21] Add that the populace, whose spirit is frequently great or humble depending on the latest circumstance,[21] easily corrected themselves in calamities and turned to God, restored the laws, and in this mode extricated themselves from every danger. In contrast, the kings, whose spirits are always equally overbearing and who cannot be reformed without ignominy, adhered tenaciously to vices until the city's[22] final downfall.

¶4 [22] From these things, we see very clearly, first, how pernicious it is both to religion and to the Republic to grant the ministers of the sacred matters° any right to decree or transact the business of the imperium. And on the other hand, everything goes on much more steadfastly if they content themselves with giving answers concerning no matter unless asked, and meanwhile with teaching and practicing only what is accepted and most usual.

2 [23] Second, how dangerous it is to refer merely theoretical matters to the divine right and set down laws concerning opinions over which human beings usually, or can, dispute. For where opinions, which are a part° of each's right which no one can yield, are considered as a crime, one is ruled very repressively. Indeed, where this happens, the anger of the plebs usually rules in the greatest degree. [24] For, to yield to the anger of the Pharisees, Pilate bade the crucifying of Christ, whom he recognized

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15 II Chr. 28:5-25.

16 Jud. 3 11, 5.31.

17 Jud. 3 30

18 Lit.: which was more than any[one's] opinion

19 More or less lit · what was to be struggled over.

20 I Ki. 18:4, 13.

21 More or less lit.: in view of the newborn matter.

22 I e., Jerusalem's.

to be innocent.[23]

3 Furthermore, to dispossess the wealthier of their privileges, the Pharisees began to raise questions concerning the religion and to accuse the Sadducees of impiety. And appealing° to this example of the Pharisees, all the worst hypocrites, agitated by the same rabidity, which they call zeal for the divine right, have everywhere persecuted men marked by probity and renowned for virtue and envied for it by the plebs—by denouncing their opinions publicly and inciting the savage multitude to anger against them.

4 [25] Yet since this brash license is covered by a show of religion, it cannot be easily controlled, especially where the highest powers have introduced some sect of which they themselves are not the authors, since then they would not be considered the interpreters of the divine right, but sectarians—that is, those who acknowledge a sect's teachers as interpreters of the divine right. And therefore the magistrates' authority {**226**} concerning these things is usually worth little among the plebs; yet the authority of a teacher to whose interpretations even kings figure they have to surrender is very much more.

5 [26] For avoiding these evils, therefore, nothing safer can be devised for a Republic than to place piety and Religious[24] worship solely in works, that is, solely in the cultivation[25] of charity and justice, and to leave each a free judgment concerning other things. But we will speak about these things more broadly afterward.[26]

6 [27] Third, we see how necessary it is, both for the Republic and for religion, to grant the highest powers the right to decree what propriety or impropriety is. For if this right to decree concerning deeds could not be granted to the divine Prophets themselves, except with great harm to the Republic and to Religion, much less is it to be granted to those who do not know how to predict future things or make miracles.

7 But I will deal with this professedly in the following.[27]

8 [28] Fourth, finally, we see how fatal it is for a populace who are not accustomed to living under kings and who already have laws set down, to choose a Monarch. For he himself will not be able to sustain such an imperium, nor the royal authority suffer the laws and rights of the populace—which have been instituted by someone else of lesser authority—and much less induce the spirit to defend them, especially since in instituting them no account could have been taken of a King, but only of the populace or the council, who deemed that they would be holding the kingdom. And so, by defending the earlier rights of the populace, the King would be seen as their servant rather than their master.

9 [29] A new Monarch, therefore, will endeavor with the utmost eagerness to establish new laws and reform the jurisdictions of the imperium for his own use and steer the populace so that they cannot take away an entitlement from the Kings as easily as they can give one.

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[23] Mt. 27:18, Mk 15:10, Lk. 23:14-15, John 18:38.

[24] Lit : Religion's.

[25] See Glossary, s.v. "worship."

[26] See 20.4 15, with the argument of Ch. 20, summarized in 20 7.1-7.

[27] See Ch. 19.

10 [30] Yet here I can never pass over the fact that it is also no less dangerous to remove a Monarch from one's midst, even though it is established in all modes that he is a tyrant. For a populace accustomed to royal authority and restrained by it alone will despise and ridicule a lesser authority; and therefore, if they remove the Monarch from their midst, it will be necessary for them, as it once was for the Prophets, to choose another in place of the earlier one, who will be a tyrant not spontaneously, but necessarily.

11 [31] For how[28] will he be able to see the hands of citizens bloodied with the royal murder, and their glorying in parricide as if it were a matter well accomplished? For they did not commit it except to set an example for him alone.

12 Surely, if he wants to be King and not acknowledge the populace as the judge of Kings and as his own master and not rule precariously, he has to avenge the former's {227} death and in turn set an example in his own cause, lest the populace dare to commit such an outrage again.

13 [32] Yet it will not be easy to avenge a tyrant's death by the slaughter of citizens, unless he defends the cause of the earlier tyrant together with his own and approves his deeds and subsequently follows all the footsteps of the earlier tyrant.

14 Hence it has come about, therefore, that a populace could often change tyrants but never remove them, nor change a monarchic imperium into another of some° other form.

15 [33] The English populace have given a fatal example of this matter, in seeking the causes with which to remove a monarch from their midst by a show of right.[29] Yet once he was removed, they were unable to do anything less than change the form of the imperium; but after much blood had been spilled, they reached the point° of hailing a new monarch by another name (as if the whole question were about the name alone); and he was unable to last[30] by any plan except by utterly destroying the royal line, slaughtering the king's friends or those suspected of friendship, and disturbing the leisure of peace—which was conducive to rumors—with a war, so that the plebs, occupied with and attentive to new matters, would divert elsewhere their thoughts concerning the royal murder.

16 [34] Too late, therefore, did the populace notice that they had done nothing for the welfare of the fatherland but violate the right of the legitimate king and change everything into a worse state.

17 Therefore, they decided to revoke their step where it was permitted, and did not rest until they saw everything restored to its pristine state.

18 [35] Yet perhaps someone will object, with the example of the Roman populace, that a populace can easily remove a tyrant from their midst; but I myself figure that our tenet is altogether confirmed. For although the Roman populace could remove a tyrant from their midst and change the form of the imperium far more easily, on account of the fact that the right to choose a king and his successor was in the

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[28] Lit.: with what rationale.

[29] Shortly after the execution of Charles I (1649), Parliament appointed Oliver Cromwell "Lord Protector" (1653-58) His son and immediate successor, Richard Cromwell, was soon replaced by Charles II (1660ff )

[30] Lit.: persist.

populace's possession and (insofar as they were ignited by seditious and profligate human beings) they were not yet accustomed to obeying kings (for out of the six they had had before, they had done away with three), still they did nothing else but choose many tyrants in place of the one: these always had them struggling miserably with external and internal war, until at last the imperium yielded to a monarch again with only the name changed,[31] just as in England.

19 [36] As for what pertains to the Orders of Holland, these have never, that we know of, had Kings, but counts, to whom the right of the imperium has never been transferred. For, as the Sovereign Orders of Holland make public in **{228}** the declaration given out by them at the time of the Count of Leicester,[32] they have always reserved for themselves the authority of admonishing those counts of their duty, and kept for themselves the power to defend this authority of theirs and the freedom of citizens, and to avenge themselves on the counts if they degenerated into tyrants and to restrain them so that they could not effect anything unless the orders grant and approve it.

20 [37] From this it follows that the right of the highest majesty, which the last count[33] endeavored to usurp, has always been in the possession of the orders. Therefore, they were far from abandoning him when they restored their first imperium, which by then had almost been lost.

21 With these examples, therefore, what we have said is altogether confirmed: the form of every imperium is necessarily to be retained, and cannot be changed without the danger of its total ruin. And these things are what I have adduced as worth the effort of noting here.

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[31] I.e., to "Caesar." Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* I.17, 52 (trans. H.C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 47f., 105)

[32] "During the Twenty-Four Years War, the Estates of the United Provinces, after the assasination of William the Silent (1584), had chosen Robert Dudley, Count of Leicester (1533-88), as Governor General, under pressure from Queen Elizabeth and in exchange for England's support. He was finally chased from power, inasmuch as he was unwilling to recognize the power of the Estates. The latter published an apologia in 1587 by François Francken (Vranck), entitled *Corte vertoninghe van het recht der Ridderschap, Edelen ende Steeden van Holland en West-Vriesland* [Short Exposition of the Right of Knighthood, Nobility and the Cities of Holland and West-Friesland] It was re-edited in 1650 by Van den Enden." Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 778, n 43

[33] Philip II of Spain.

# CHAPTER 19

## It is shown that the right concerning sacred matters° is altogether in the possession of the highest powers, and Religion's outward worship has to be accommodated to the peace of the Republic if we want to comply with God Properly[1]

¶1 When I said above that only those who hold the imperium have the right to everything and that every right depends solely on their decree,[2] I meant to understand not only civil but also sacred right. For they have to be the interpreters and avengers of the latter as well. Yet I want to note this expressly here and treat it professedly in this Chapter, since there are a great many who flatly deny that this right—namely, concerning sacred matters°—belongs to the highest powers, and do not want to acknowledge them as the interpreters of the divine right. [2] Hence they also take for themselves a license for accusing and betraying them, indeed, excommunicating them from the Church (as Ambrose once did to Theodosius Caesar).[3]

2 But we will see later in the Chapter[4] that, for this reason, they are dividing the imperium, indeed, trying to take over the imperium. For I want to show beforehand[5] that Religion receives the force of right solely from the decree of those who have the right to command. And God does not have any special kingdom over human beings except through those who hold the imperium; and besides, Religious[6] worship and the exercise of piety {229} has to be accommodated to the peace and utility of the Republic and, consequently, be determined solely by the highest powers—who thus have to be its interpreters as well.

3 [3] I speak expressly of the exercise of piety and Religion's outward worship—not of piety itself and the inward worship of God, or the means by which the mind is inwardly disposed to worship God with a fullness of spirit. For the inward worship of

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1 Lit.: correctly Likewise at 19 1.21, 2.7, 9

2 See P.5.18, 16.6.1-20

3 See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV 11.3-4, 12.7 (2 vols.; trans. F. L. Battles [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960], II, 1215-16, 1235).

4 See 19.2.22-26

5 See 19.1.7- 21a .

6 Lit.: Religion's Cf. 19.1.3.

God and piety itself is a part° of each's right (as we have shown at the end of Ch. 7)[7] which cannot be transferred to another.

4 [4] Besides, what I understand by God's Kingdom here, I figure is sufficiently established from Chapter 14.[8] For in it we have shown that one who cultivates justice and charity on the basis of God's commandment fulfills the law of God. Hence it follows that that Kingdom is God's in which justice and charity have the force of right and command.

5 [5] Yet here I acknowledge no difference whether God teaches and commands the true cultivation of justice and charity by the natural light or by revelation. For how that cult[9] is revealed is not important, only that it obtain the highest right and be the highest law for human beings.

6 [6] If, therefore, I now show that justice and charity cannot receive the force of right and command except on the basis of the right of the imperium, I will easily conclude from it (inasmuch as the right of the imperium is in the possession of the highest powers only) that Religion receives the force of right solely on the basis of the decree of those who have the right to command, and God has no special kingdom over human beings except through those who hold the imperium.

7 [7] Yet that the cultivation of justice and charity does not receive the force of right except on the basis of the right of the imperium is obvious from[10] the foregoing. For we have shown in Chapter 16[11] that in the natural state, reason has no more right than appetite; but those who live in accordance with the laws of the appetite have the right to everything they can do, just like those who live in accordance with the laws of reason.

8 [8] Because of this, we could not conceive sin in the natural state, nor God as a judge who punishes human beings on account of sins; but everything is borne with in accordance with the laws common to nature as such, and (if I might speak with Solomon)[12] the same fate[13] happens to the just and the impious, the pure and the impure, etc., and there is no place for justice and charity.

9 Yet for the lessons of true reason—that is (as we have shown in Ch. 4 concerning the divine law),[14] the divine lessons themselves—to have the force of right absolutely, it was necessary that each yield his natural right {230} and that everyone transfer it to all or to a few or to one; and then at last it became known to us what justice, injustice, equity, and inequity were.[15]

10 [9] Justice, therefore, and absolutely all the lessons of true reason—and consequently charity toward a neighbor—receive the force of right and command

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[7] See 7.11 44-49.

[8] See especially 14.1 7-14

[9] See Glossary, s v "worship "

[10] Or: on the basis of (as earlier in 19.1.7)

[11] See 16 2.1-3.3.

[12] Eccles 9 2

[13] Lit case. Likewise in 19 1.20

[14] See especially 4.2 3-4 11

[15] Cf. 16.5 1-6 20 with 16.7.5 and context

solely from the right of the imperium, that is (through what we have shown in the same Chapter),[16] solely from the decree of those who have the right to command. And since (as I have already shown)[17] God's kingdom consists solely in the right of justice and charity, or of true Religion, it follows that we will not want God to have any kingdom over human beings except through those who hold the imperium—and therefore, I say, whether we conceive Religion as° revealed by the natural light or by the Prophetic one. [10] For the demonstration is universal, since religion is the same and is equally revealed by God, whether it is supposed to have become known in this or that mode. And therefore, for a Prophetically revealed religion to have the force of right among the Hebrews as well, it was necessary for each of them to yield his natural right beforehand, and for all to state by common consent that they would obey only what was revealed to them Prophetically from God, in exactly the same mode as we have shown to come about in a democratic imperium, where everyone resolves by common consent to live solely by the dictate of reason.[18] [11] And although the Hebrews transferred their right to God besides, they could have done this in the mind rather than in deed. For in reality (as we have seen above),[19] they absolutely retained the right of the imperium until they transferred it to Moses, who absolutely remained a king from then on, and God ruled over the Hebrews through him alone.

11 [12] Besides, because of this as well (that religion receives the force of right solely on the basis of the jurisdiction[20] of the imperium), Moses could not affect by any comeuppance those who violated the Sabbath before the compact and who consequently were under their own jurisdiction till then (see Ex. 16:27), as he could after the compact (see Num. 15:36)—after each had yielded his natural right and the Sabbath received the force of a commandment on the basis of the jurisdiction of the imperium.[21]

12 [13] Finally, because of this as well, once the Hebrews' imperium was destroyed, revealed Religion stopped having the force of right. For we can never doubt that, once the Hebrews transferred their right to the King of the Babylonians, the kingdom of God and the divine right henceforth ceased.

13 [14] For by the same token, the compact by which they had promised to obey everything that God spoke **{231}** and which was the foundation of God's kingdom, was altogether removed; and they could not stand by it any longer, since from that time they were no longer under their own jurisdiction (as they were in the desert or in the fatherland) but were in that of the king of Babylonia, whom they were bound to obey in all things (as we have shown in Ch. 16);[22] Jeremiah, at 29:7, expressly admonishes them concerning this as well.

14 *Consult*, he says, *the peace of the city to which I have led you captive. For there*

[16] See 4 2 2, 16 6.1-7 15

[17] See 19 1 2-9.

[18] See 16 6 1-2

[19] See 17.4.1-5.9

[20] Or: right. Likewise later in 19.1.11. See Index of Terms, s.v. "right."

[21] Cf. 5.3 1-9

[22] See 16.8.21.

*will be safety for you in its safety.*

15 [15] Yet they could not consult the safety of that city as ministers of the imperium (for they were captives), but as slaves—to avoid seditions by guaranteeing that they were obedient in all things and by observing the rights and laws of the imperium, even though they were quite different from the laws they had been used to in the fatherland, etc.

16 [16] From all these things, it follows very plainly that Religion among the Hebrews received the force of right solely from the right of the imperium; and this being destroyed, it could no longer be considered as the bidding of a special imperium, but the catholic lesson of reason. Of reason, I say. For the Catholic Religion had not yet become known by revelation.

17 [17] We absolutely conclude, therefore, that whether a religion is revealed by the natural light or by the Prophetic one, it receives the force of a command solely by the decree of those who have the right to command; and God has no special kingdom over human beings except through those who hold the imperium.

18 [18] This also follows, and is also understood more clearly, from what has been said in Chapter 4.[23]

19 For there we have shown that God's decrees all involve eternal truth and necessity, and that God cannot be conceived as a prince or lawgiver giving°[24] laws to human beings.

20 [19] On that account, the divine lessons revealed by the natural or the Prophetic light do not receive the force of a command immediately from God, but, necessarily, from those—or with those mediating—who have the right to command and decree. And so, unless with those mediating, we cannot conceive that God rules over human beings and directs human affairs in accordance with justice and equity: this is also proved by experience itself. [20] For no traces of divine justice are found except where just men rule. Otherwise (if I might repeat Solomon's words once again)[25] we see that the same fate happens to the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure: this has made very many doubt divine providence who deemed that God rules over human beings immediately and directs the whole of nature for their use. {232}

21 [21] Accordingly, since it is established from experience as well as from reason that divine right depends solely on the decree of the highest powers, it follows that they are its interpreters as well. For what reason, moreover, we will now see. For it is time for us to show that religion's outward worship, and all exercise of piety, has to be accommodated to the peace and preservation of the republic, if we want to comply with God properly.

22 Once this is demonstrated, moreover, we might easily understand for what reason the highest powers are the interpreters of religion and piety.

¶2 [22] It is certain that piety toward the fatherland is the utmost someone can guarantee; for, once an imperium is removed, nothing good can subsist,[26] but everything

[23] See 4.4.14-31

[24] Lit.. bearing. See note to 8.1 47

[25] See 19.1 8.

[26] Lit consist.

comes into disarray and, to everyone's very great dread, anger and impiety alone rule. Hence it follows that nothing can be guaranteed to be pious to one's neighbor which would not be impious if harm to the whole republic were to follow from it; and, on the contrary, nothing impious can be committed against him which would not be attributed to piety if it were done on account of the preservation of the republic.

2 [23] For example, to one who contends with me and wants to take my coat, it is pious to give my cloak as well.[27]

3 Yet where it is judged that this is pernicious to the preservation of the republic, it is on the contrary pious to call him to judgment, even if he is to be condemned to death.

4 Because of this, Manlius Torquatus is celebrated:[28] the welfare of the populace was worth more to him than piety toward a son.

5 [24] Since this is so, it follows that the welfare of the populace is the highest law,[29] to which all laws°, human as well as divine, have to be accommodated.

6 Yet since it is the duty of the highest power alone to determine what is necessary for the welfare of the whole populace and the security of the imperium, and to command what it judges to be necessary, hence it follows that it is the duty of the highest power as well to determine by what plan each has to treat[30] his neighbor with piety, that is, by what plan each is bound to obey God.

7 [25] From these things, we clearly understand for what reason the highest powers are the interpreters of religion. Furthermore, no one can obey God properly if he does not accommodate to the public utility the cultivation of the piety by which each is bound, and, consequently, if he does not obey all the decrees of the highest power.

8 [26] For since, on the basis of God's commandment, we are bound to treat everyone with piety (no one excepted) and bring harm to no one, hence it follows that no one is permitted to supply aid to anyone when it is to another's harm—and much less the whole republic's. And so {233} no one can treat his neighbor with piety in accordance with God's commandment unless he accommodates piety and religion to the public utility.

9 [27] Yet no private person° can know what is useful for the republic except by the decrees of the highest powers, whose job° alone it is to transact the public business. Therefore, no one can properly cultivate piety or obey God unless he complies with all the decrees of the highest powers. [28] Yet this is also confirmed by practice itself.

10 For no subject is permitted to supply help to someone whom the highest powers have judged to be guilty of a capital crime°[31] or to be an enemy, whether citizen or outsider, whether private person or one who holds an imperium over others.

11 So, too, although it had been said to the Hebrews that each should love his companion as himself (see Lev. 19:17-18), they were still bound to indicate to a

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27 Mt 5.40, Lk. 6:29.

28 See Livy VIII.6-7. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* III.22, 34 (trans. Mansfield and Tarcov, 264-68, 287-90).

29 Cf. Cicero, *Laws* III.3

30 See Glossary, s.v. "worship." Likewise in 19.2.8(2x), 12.

31 Lit.: of death. Likewise in 19 2.11.

Judge one who had committed something against the edicts of the laws (see Lev. 5:1, Dt. 13:8-9) and to slay him if he was judged guilty of a capital crime° (see Dt. 17:7).

12 [29] Furthermore, for the Hebrews to be able to preserve the freedom they had acquired and retain the lands they occupied with an absolute imperium, it was necessary, as we have shown in Chapter 17,[32] for them to accommodate the religion to their imperium alone and to separate themselves from the other nations. And therefore it had been said to them, *Cherish your neighbor and hate your enemy* (see Mt. 5:43). [30] After they lost their imperium and were led captive to Babylon, however, Jeremiah[33] taught them to consult (as well) the safety of that city into which they had been led captive; and after Christ saw that they were going to be dispersed through the whole globe,[34] he taught them to treat absolutely everyone with piety. All of this shows very plainly that religion has always been accommodated to the utility of the republic.

13 [31] If someone now asks, however, by what right Christ's disciples—being private men—were therefore able to preach the religion, I say that they did so by right of the power they received from Christ against impure Spirits (see Mt. 10:1).

14 [32] For I have expressly admonished above, at the end of Chapter 16,[35] that everyone is bound to keep faith even with a Tyrant, except one to whom God has promised special help against the Tyrant by a certain revelation. Therefore, no one is permitted to take an example from it unless he also has the power to make miracles, because it is also conspicuous here that Christ also said to the disciples not to dread those **{234}** who kill bodies (see Mt. 10:28).

15 [33] For if this had been said to anyone, an imperium would be established in vain, and that saying of Solomon's, *My son, fear God and the king* (Prov. 24:21), would have been said impiously, because it is far from true. And so, it is necessarily to be confessed that the authority Christ gave the disciples was only given specifically to them, and no example can be taken from it for others.

16 [34] Otherwise, I am in no way° fazed by the reasons of my adversaries, by which they want to separate sacred from civil right and contend that the latter alone is in the possession of the highest powers, whereas the former is in the possession of the church as such. For they are so frivolous as not to deserve refutation.

17 [35] This one thing I am unable to pass over in silence: how pathetically they are deceived in taking it as an example for confirming this seditious opinion (I beg forgiveness for the rather harsh word) from the high Pontiff of the Hebrews, in whose possession the right to administer sacred matters° once was—as if the Pontiffs had not received that right from Moses (who, as we have shown above,[36] retained the highest imperium), by whose decree they could also be deprived of it. For he chose not only Aaron but also his son Eleazar and his nephew Pinchas, and gave them the authority to administer the pontificate, which they afterward retained so as nevertheless to be seen as substitutes for Moses, that is, for the highest power. For, as we have already

[32] See 17 4 8-11ff

[33] See 19.1 13-15.

[34] Lk. 21:24, Rom. 11:25, Rev. 7·9

[35] See 16.8.13-20.

[36] See 17 5 1-4, 22-25.

shown,[37] Moses chose no successor to the imperium, but distributed all its duties so that later men° would be seen as his representatives, administering the imperium as if the king were absent, not dead.

18 [37] In the second imperium, furthermore, the Pontiffs held this right absolutely, after they acquired the right of the principate along with the pontificate.

19 Therefore, the right of the pontificate always depended on the edict of the highest power; and the Pontiffs never held that right unless along with the principate.

20 [38] Indeed, the right concerning sacred matters° was in the possession of the Kings absolutely (as will be obvious from what is soon to be said at the end of this Chapter),[38] with this one exception: they were not permitted to put their hands on the sacred things to be administered in the temple, since everyone was considered profane who did not draw his genealogy from Aaron—surely this has no place in a Christian imperium. [39] And therefore, we cannot doubt that nowadays sacred matters° (whose administration requires special morals,[39] not family connections°, so that those who hold the imperium are not excluded from them for being profane) {235} are solely the right of the highest powers. And except by their authority or concession, no one has the right and power to administer them, to choose their ministers, to determine and stabilize the foundations of the Church and its teaching, to judge morals and acts of piety, to excommunicate anyone or receive anyone into the Church, or, finally, to provide for the poor.

21 [40] Yet these things not only are demonstrated to be true (as we have already done),[40] but also are necessary first and foremost not only for religion itself, but also for the preservation of the republic. For everyone knows how much the right and authority concerning sacred matters° prevails among the populace, and how much each depends on the mouth of him who has it—so that one is permitted to affirm that he to whom this authority belongs rules over their psyches in the greatest degree.

22 [41] If someone wants to take it away from the highest powers, therefore, he is eager to divide the imperium: from this there necessarily have to arise quarrels and discords which can never be calmed, as there were long ago between the Kings and Pontiffs of the Hebrews.[41] Indeed, he who is eager to take away this authority from the highest powers is trying to take over the imperium (as we have already said).[42]

23 [42] For what can they decree if this right is denied them? Nothing, in fact, either about war or about peace, or about any business whatever, if they are bound to wait for the pronouncement[43] of someone else, who would teach them whether what they judge useful is pious or impious. But on the contrary, let everything be done on the basis of the decree of one who has the right to judge and decree what is pious or impious, propriety or impropriety.

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[37] See 17.5.10-12

[38] See 19 3.10-17

[39] Or· mores Likewise later in 19.2.20.

[40] See 19.1 21-2.20

[41] See 17.12.27-13.6, esp. 17.12.38ff.

[42] See 19 1.2.

[43] See Glossary, s.v "tenet."

24 [43] Every age sees examples of this matter, of which I will bring up only one, which is an instance of them all.

25 Since this right had been granted to the Roman Pontiff absolutely, he at last began to have every King little by little under his control, until he ascended to the highest pinnacle of the imperium as well. And whatever the monarchs, and especially the German Kaisers, endeavored to do afterward to take away his authority even a bit, they accomplished nothing; but on the contrary, by the same token they enlarged that authority by many degrees.

26 [44] Be that as it may, what no Monarch could do, neither with iron nor with fire, Churchmen could do solely with a mere pen, so that even here it is easily discerned how much its force and power[44] are, and how necessary it is for the highest powers to reserve this authority for themselves.

27 [45] For if we also wanted to consider what we have noted in an earlier Chapter,[45] {236} we will see that this very same thing is also conducive in no small way° to the enhancement of religion and piety. For we have seen above that although the Prophets themselves were endowed with divine virtue, yet since they were private men, by their freedom to admonish, scold and reprove they provoked rather than corrected human beings, who yet when admonished or chastised by the Kings were easily turned around.

28 Furthermore, the kings themselves, only from the fact that this right did not belong to them absolutely, very often broke from the religion, and with them almost the whole populace: this has happened very often in Christian imperiums as well, owing to the same cause.

29 [46] Yet perhaps someone will ask me here: Who therefore will avenge piety by right, if those who hold the imperium want to be impious? Are they then to be considered its interpreters too?

30 But I ask him, on the contrary: What if Churchmen (who are human beings as well, and private ones, on whom it is incumbent to care only for their own business) wanted to be impious, or others in whose possession he wants there to be a right concerning sacred matters°—are they then to be considered its interpreters too?

31 [47] It is indeed certain that, if those who hold the imperium wanted to do as they please, whether they have the right concerning sacred matters° or not, everything, both sacred and profane, would fall into ruin—and far more quickly if those who wanted to avenge the divine right seditiously are private men.

32 [48] On that account, absolutely nothing is gained by denying this right to them; but on the contrary, the evil is augmented more, for by this same token they would necessarily become impious (just as the Kings of the Hebrews did by not having been granted this right absolutely); and, consequently, the harm and evil to the whole republic, from being uncertain and contingent, would be rendered certain and necessary.

33 [49] Whether we look at the truth of the matter, or the security of the imperium,

[44] Here, for the only time in Ch. 19, "power" is *potentia* rather than *potestas*. See note on "power" at P.5.14

[45] See 18 2.1

or, finally, the enhancement of piety, therefore, we are compelled to state that the divine right, or the right concerning sacred matters°, absolutely depends on the decree of the highest powers and that they are its interpreters and avengers—from which it follows that those who teach the populace by the authority of the highest powers are the ministers of God's word just as it has been accommodated to the public utility by their decree.

¶3 [50] It is now left to indicate as well the cause of why this right has always been disputed in a Christian imperium, while yet the Hebrews never, that I know of, wavered concerning it.

2 Surely it could seem rather monstrous that there should always be a question concerning a matter so manifest and so necessary, {237} and that the highest powers never had this right without controversy—indeed, never except with the great danger of seditions and great detriment to religion.

3 [51] In fact, if we could not assign any certain cause of this matter, I might easily persuade myself that everything I have shown in this Chapter is only theoretical, or of the genus of those theories that can never be of use. For to one who considers the very origins of the Christian religion, the cause of this matter manifests itself altogether.

4 [52] For, the first to teach the Christian religion were not kings but private men, who, with the disapproval of those who held the imperium and whose subjects they were, were long accustomed to addressing private Churches, instituting and administering the sacred duties, and ordering and decreeing everything on their own, without taking any account of the imperium. [53] When after many years had elapsed the religion began to be introduced into the imperium, however, Churchmen had to teach it—just as they had determined it—to the Emperors themselves: from this it could easily obtain that Churchmen were acknowledged as its teachers and interpreters and the Church's pastors and as it were God's representatives besides; and, so that Christian Kings could not afterward take this authority for themselves, Churchmen took the best precaution: prohibiting marriage for the supreme ministers of the Church and for the highest interpreter of the religion.

5 [54] It went along with this, besides, that they had enlarged the dogmas of the Religion to so great a number and so confused them with Philosophy that its highest interpreter had to be the highest Philosopher and Theologian, and dabble in very many useless theories: this can only happen to private men abounding in leisure.

6 [55] Yet among the Hebrews the matter was quite otherwise. For their Church began at the same time as their imperium; and Moses—who held it absolutely—taught the populace religion, ordered the sacred ministries, and chose their ministers.

7 Hence, on the contrary, it came about that the royal authority prevailed among the populace in the greatest degree, and the Kings held the right concerning sacred matters° in the greatest degree.

8 [56] For although after Moses' death no one held the imperium absolutely, yet the right to decree concerning sacred matters° as well as concerning the remaining things was in possession of the prince (as we have already shown).[46] Furthermore, for

[46] See 17 5.4-6.5, 19 2.20.

the populace to be taught religion and piety, they were not bound to approach the Pontiff rather than the supreme Judge.

9 (See Dt. 17:9, 11.)

10 [57] Finally, although the Kings did not have a right equal to Moses', {238} yet the ordering[47] and choosing of almost every sacred minister depended on their decree. For David devised the whole construction of the temple (see I Chr. 28:11-12, etc.); he furthermore chose twenty-four thousand out of all the Levites for singing psalms; and six thousand of them were chosen to be Judges and praetors; furthermore, four thousand were to be doorkeepers; and, finally, four thousand were to play musical instruments.

11 (See *idem* 23:4-5.)

12 [58] Besides, he divided them into cohorts (whose leaders he also chose), so that, in keeping with their roles, each would administer at its time.

13 (See *idem*, vs. 5.)

14 The Priests he divided into so many cohorts in the same way°. [59] But so as not to be bound to recounting everything specifically, I refer the reader to II Chronicles 8, where, at verse 13, it is said, *The worship of God was administered in the temple on the basis of Solomon's command, just as Moses had instituted it*; and, at verse 14, *that he* (Solomon) *consitituted cohorts of priests in their ministries, and of Levites, etc., in accordance with the bidding of the divine man David.*

15 And finally, at verse 15, the Historian attests *that they did not depart from the King's precept imposed on the priests and the Levites in any matter, and not in administering the treasuries*—from all of which, and the other histories[48] of the Kings, it follows very plainly that the whole exercise of religion and the ministry of sacred matters° depended solely on the command of the Kings.

16 [60] When I said above,[49] however, that they did not have the right, as Moses did, of choosing the high pontiff, of consulting God immediately, and of condemning Prophets who prophesied while they were alive, I did not say it because of anything other than that the Prophets, by the authority they had, could choose a new King and give a pardon to a parricide—yet calling a King into judgment for daring something against the laws, and acting against him by right, were not permitted.[50]

17 [62] On that account, if there had been no Prophets who could, by a special revelation, safely grant a pardon to a parricide, the Kings would have had the right to absolutely everything, both sacred and civil. [63] Therefore, the highest powers of today, who do not have Prophets and are not bound by right to accept them (for they are not sworn to the laws of the Hebrews), have this right absolutely and will always retain it—even if they are not celibate—provided only that the dogmas of Religion are not enlarged to a great number and are not confused with the sciences.

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[47] Lit.: order

[48] Or: stories.

[49] Cf. 17 5.22-23, 28.

[50] "Cf Annotation 39." Spinoza's note.

# CHAPTER 20

## It is shown that, in a Free Republic, each is permitted both to think what he wants and to say what he thinks[1]

¶1 {239} If it were equally easy to command psyches as it is tongues,[2] each ruler° would rule safely and no imperium would be repressive. For each subject° would live on the basis of the mental cast of those commanding and would judge what is true or false, good or evil, equitable or inequitable, solely on the basis of their decree.

2 [2] But as we have already noted at the beginning of Chapter 17,[3] this—for a psyche to be under another's jurisdiction[4]—cannot come about. For no one can transfer to another his natural right—or his faculty—of reasoning freely and judging anything whatever, nor be compelled to do so.

3 [3] Hence it comes about, therefore, that an imperium that intrudes[5] into psyches is considered repressive, and the highest majesty seems to do wrong to subjects and usurp their right when it wants to prescribe to each what to embrace as true and reject as false, and by what opinions each's psyche has to be moved in devotion toward God besides. For these are a part° of each's right which no one can yield even if he wanted to.

4 [4] I confess that judgment can be predisposed in many, almost unbelievable modes, so that, although it is not directly under another's imperium, it still so depends on the mouth of another that, to that extent, it can deservedly be said to be under his jurisdiction. But, whatever is technically possible[6] in this matter, it still has never come about that human beings fail to[7] experience that each is full of his own sense of things°, and that there are as many distinctions among heads as there are among palates.[8]

5 [5] Moses, who had predisposed the judgment of his populace in the greatest degree, not by a ruse but by divine virtue, so that he was believed to be divine and to

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[1] Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* I.1

[2] Cf. Curtius, *History of Alexander* VII.5.5.

[3] See 17 1.2-3.

[4] Or: right. Likewise in 20.1.4.

[5] Lit.. is.

[6] Lit.: whatever an art could guarantee.

[7] Lit.: do not ever.

[8] Cf. Horace, *Satires* II.1 27.

speak by divine inspiration, still could not escape its rumors and sinister interpretations,[9] and much less could other Monarchs; and if by some plan this could be conceived, it would at least be conceived in a monarchic imperium and hardly in a democratic one, which everyone, or a great part of the populace, holds collectively. I figure the cause of this matter is obvious to everyone.

¶2 [6] {**240**} However much the highest powers are believed to have the right to everything and be the interpreters of right and piety, therefore, they still can never make human beings not pass judgment on any matters on the basis of their own mental cast, and not be affected to that extent by this or that emotion.

2 It is true that, by right, they can consider as an enemy everyone who does not absolutely think as they do in everything; but we are not disputing now about their right, but about what is useful. [7] For I grant that by right they can rule repressively and lead citizens to the slaughter for the flimsiest of causes; but everyone will deny that this can come about in keeping with the judgment of sound reason. Indeed, since they are unable to do these things without great danger to the whole imperium, we can also deny that they have the absolute power to do these and similar things, and consequently the absolute right as well. For we have shown that the right of the highest powers is determined by their power.[10]

¶3 [8] If, accordingly, no one can yield his freedom to judge and to think what he wants, but each by right of nature is master of his own thoughts in the greatest degree, it follows that in a republic one can never attempt—unless with quite unhappy success—to make° human beings, who think different and contrary things, still speak nothing except on the basis of the prescription of the highest powers. For not even the most experienced, to say nothing of the plebs, know how to be silent.

2 [9] It is a common vice of human beings to trust one's counsel to others, even if the need is for silence. Where each is denied the freedom to speak and teach what he thinks, therefore, the imperium will be very repressive; and on the contrary, where each is granted this same freedom, it will be moderate.

3 [10] Be that as it may, we can also never deny that treason is possible[11] in words as well as in reality; and so, if it is impossible to take this freedom away from subjects completely, it will on the other hand be very pernicious to grant it altogether. On that account, it is incumbent on us here to inquire how far this freedom can and has to be granted in keeping with the peace of the republic and the right of the highest powers: this, as I have admonished at the beginning of Chapter 16,[12] has been my chief intent here.

¶4 [11] From the foundations of a Republic as explained above,[13] it follows very plainly that its ultimate aim is not to dominate or restrain human beings by dread and make them part° of another's right, but, on the contrary, to free each from dread {**241**}

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[9] Ex. 14 11-12, 15:24, 16:2-11, 17:2-7, Num 11.1-6, 12:1-8, 14 1-10, 20:2-10, 21:4-7, Dt. 1:26.

[10] See 16.4.1-6.20, esp. 16 6.1-5. Here and earlier in 20 2 2, "power" is *potentia*, rather than *potestas* (as in "highest powers," immediately preceding). See note on "power" at P 5.14

[11] More or less lit.: that majesty can be harmed.

[12] Cf. 16.1 1-2.

[13] See 16 5.1-17

so that he can live securely as far as it can come about for him, that is, so that he retains his natural right to exist and operate without harm to himself or another.

2 [12] The aim of a Republic is not, I say, to make human beings from rational beings°[14] into beasts or puppets, but, on the contrary, it is for their mind and body to function safely in their functions and for them to use free reason and not struggle in hatred, in anger, or with a ruse, and not bear an inequitable spirit toward one another.

3 The aim of a Republic, therefore, is really freedom.

4 [13] Besides, for forming a Republic we have seen this one thing to have been necessary: namely, that all power to decree be in the possession of all, or some, or one.

5 For inasmuch as the free judgment of human beings is quite varied, and each deems that he alone knows everything, and everyone cannot be made to think the same thing equally or to speak with one mouth, they could not live peacefully unless each yielded the right to act solely on the basis of the decree of his own mind.

6 [14] Therefore, each has yielded only the right to act on the basis of his very own decree, not to reason and judge. And so, in keeping with the right of the highest powers, no one can act against their decrees; yet he can altogether think, judge, and consequently also say something contrary to their decrees, provided that he only says or teaches and defends it simply, and by reason alone, not by a ruse, in anger, in hatred, or in the spirit of introducing something into the republic on the basis of the authority of his own decree.

7 [15] For example, if someone shows that some law conflicts with sound reason and argues on that account that it is to be repealed, if at the same time he submits his tenet to the judgment of the highest power (whose job° alone it is to set down and repeal laws) and meanwhile does nothing against the prescription of that law, surely he deserves well of the republic, like any very good citizen. But if, on the contrary, he does so to accuse the magistrate of inequity and render him hateful to the vulgar, or is eager to repeal the law seditiously, against the magistrate's wishes, he is altogether a rabble-rouser and a rebel.

8 [16] We see, accordingly, by what plan each can say and teach what he thinks in keeping with the right and authority of the highest powers, that is, in keeping with the peace of the Republic. Namely, if he leaves to them the decreeing[15] of all matters to be enacted and does nothing against their decree, even if he often has to act against what he judges and openly thinks is good—this he can, indeed, has to do in keeping with justice and piety, if he wants to guarantee that he is just and pious. [17] {**242**} For as we have already shown,[16] justice depends solely on the decree of the highest powers; and so no one can be just except one who lives in accordance with their decrees.

9 The highest piety, moreover (through what we have shown in the previous Chapter),[17] is the one that is exercised in connection with the peace and tranquility of

[14] Or: by rational means°. Cf. Glossary, s.v. "on the basis of."

[15] Lit.: decree.

[16] See 19.1 6-10.

[17] See 19.2.1-33.

the republic. Yet this cannot be preserved if it were left° to each to live on the basis of a decision of his own mind. And so it is also impious to do on the basis of one's own decision something against a decree of the highest power whose subject he is, since, if each were permitted to do so, the ruin of the republic would necessarily follow from it.

10 [18] Indeed, he can do nothing against the decree and dictate of his own reason so long as he acts in conjunction with the decrees of the highest power. For, at reason's own urging, he has altogether decreed transferring to it his right to live on the basis of his own judgment. [19] At any rate, we can also confirm this by what goes on° in practice itself. For in the councils of the highest powers, as well as of lesser ones, rarely is something done by a common[18] vote of all the members, and yet everything is done by the common decree of all—those who cast a vote *against* as well as those *for*.

11 [20] But I return to my point. By what plan each can use his freedom of Judgment in keeping with the right of the highest powers, we have seen from the foundations of the republic.[19]

12 Yet on the basis of these we can determine no less easily which opinions in a Republic are seditious—those, no doubt, by which, at the same time as they are posited, the compact is removed by which each has yielded the right to act on the basis of his own decision.

13 [21] For example, if someone thought the highest power was not within its right, or that no one had to stand by his promises, or that each must live on the basis of his own decision, and other things in this mode which directly conflict with the aforementioned compact, he is seditious not so much on account of the judgment and the opinion, as on account of the deed that such judgments involve: viz., since by that same token—that he thinks such a thing—he dissolves the faith given tacitly or expressly to the highest power. And therefore other opinions, which do not involve an act such as breaking a compact, vengeance, anger, etc., are not seditious, except perhaps in a Republic corrupted for some reason—where the superstitious and the ambitious, who are unable to bear the forthright, have achieved such a famous name[20] that their authority is stronger among the plebs than that of the highest powers. [22] **{243}** And still, we do not deny that there are some tenets besides, which, although they seem to turn simply on what is true and false, are yet proposed and divulged in an inequitable spirit.

14 But we have already determined these as well, in Chapter 15,[21] yet so that reason nevertheless remains free.

15 [23] For if, finally, we paid attention as well to the fact that each's faith toward the Republic, like that toward God, can be known solely on the basis of works—namely, on the basis of charity toward one's neighbor—we will never be able to doubt that the best republic grants the same freedom of philosophizing to each which we have

[18] I.e., unanimous

[19] Cf 20.4 1-10.

[20] More or less lit. reached such a fame of name

[21] See 15.1 58-64 and context

shown faith grants to each.[22]

16 [24] I do confess that some disadvantages sometimes arise from such freedom. But what has ever been so wisely instituted that nothing disadvantageous could arise from it? One who wants to determine everything by laws will provoke vices rather than correct them°.

17 What cannot be prohibited is necessarily to be granted, even if harm were often to follow from it.

18 [25] For how many evils arise from luxury, envy, greed, drunkenness, and other, similar things? Yet these things are borne with, since although they may really be vices, they cannot be prohibited by an imperium of laws. Therefore, all the more does freedom of judgment have to be granted: in fact, it is a virtue and cannot be suppressed.

19 [26] Add that no disadvantages arise from it which cannot be avoided (as I will show right away) by the authority of the magistrates—not to mention that this freedom is necessary first and foremost for advancing the sciences and arts. For these are only cultivated with happy success by those who have judgment that is free and minimally predisposed.

¶5 [27] Yet let it be posited that this freedom can be suppressed, and human beings so restrained that they dare not murmur anything except on the basis of the prescription of the highest powers. In fact, it will never come about that they are thinking nothing except what the latter want. And thus it would necessarily follow that every day human beings think one thing and say another, and consequently faith, necessary first and foremost in a Republic, would be corrupted, and abominable flattery and betrayal be fostered—hence ruses and the corruption of all good arts.

2 [28] But it is far from being able to come about that everyone speak as prearranged. But on the contrary, the more one is concerned[23] to withhold the freedom to speak from human beings, the more stubbornly they strive to the contrary—not the greedy, the flatterers, and other weak-spirited ones {244} whose highest salvation is contemplating money in the bank and having an overfull stomach, but those whom good education, integrity of morals, and virtue have made freer.

3 [29] Human beings are mostly so constituted as to bear nothing more impatiently than the fact that the opinions they believe to be true are considered as a crime and that what moves them to piety toward God and human beings is imputed to them as wickedness: from this it comes about that they dare to vilify the laws and do anything whatever against the magistrate. Nor do they deem that it is shameful, but highly honorable, to stir up seditions because of this, or attempt any outrage whatever.

4 [30] Accordingly, since it is established that human nature is so equipped, it follows that laws that are set down concerning opinions do not have to do with criminals but with the forthright, and are not set down for controlling the malicious but rather for provoking the honorable; and such laws cannot be defended without great danger to the imperium.

5 [31] Add that such laws are altogether useless. For those who believe that the

[22] See 18 4.5.

[23] Lit.: it is cared

opinions condemned by the laws are sound cannot obey the laws; those, on the other hand, who reject them as false, accept the laws by which they are condemned as prerogatives, and so triumph in these that a magistrate would not be strong enough to repeal them afterward even if he wanted to.

6 [32] Along with these things goes item[24] two of the things we deduced from the histories[25] of the Hebrews in Chapter 18, above.[26] And, finally, how many schisms have arisen in the Church mostly from the fact that magistrates have wanted to settle the controversies of teachers by laws? For if human beings were not bound by the hope of drawing the laws and magistrates to themselves, and of triumphing over their adversaries and acquiring honors to the common applause of the vulgar, they would never strive in such an inequitable spirit; nor would such fury agitate their minds.

7 [33] Yet not only reason, but also experience teaches these things by everyday examples. Namely, such laws—by which what is to be believed by each is commanded, and saying or writing anything against this or that opinion is prohibited—have often been instituted to bribe, or rather yield to, the anger of those who cannot bear free intellects,[27] and by a harsh authority can easily change the devotion of a seditious plebs into a rage and instigate it against whomever they want.

8 [34] Yet how much more satisfactory it would be to curb the anger and fury of the vulgar than to establish useless laws that cannot be violated except by those who love the virtues and the arts, and to bring the Republic to such a strait that {245} it cannot abide forthright men?

9 [35] For what greater evil can be devised for a Republic than for honorable men to be sent into exile as reprobates since they think different things and do not know how to dissemble? What is more pernicious, I say, than for human beings to be considered as enemies and be led to the slaughter, not from any wickedness or outrage, but since they are of a free mental cast;[28] and that the scaffold—the intimidator of evil men—should, by a remarkable abuse of majesty, be made into a most beautiful theater for showing the highest example of tolerance and virtue? [36] For those who recognize themselves to be honorable do not fear death or beg for mercy as criminals do, and do not pray to avert a comeuppance. For their spirit is not choked by any penitence over a shameful deed; but on the contrary, they deem it honorable, not a comeuppance, to die for a good cause, and glorious to die for freedom.

10 What example is set, therefore, by the slaughter of such men, whose cause the listless and the impotent in spirit[29] are ignorant of, the seditious begrudge, and the honorable love?

11 Surely no one can take an example from it, except to imitate or at least praise

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[24] Lit.: number.

[25] Or: stories.

[26] See 18.2.1-2

[27] Or, if the immediately preceding words "cannot bear" are to be understood—ironically—as implying "do not have in themselves" (as in, say, 20.4.2) rather than "cannot tolerate in others": mental cast. Cf. 20.5.9. See Glossary, s.v. "mental cast."

[28] Or: intellect. See Glossary, s.v. "mental cast."

[29] Elsewhere (the two Latin words being inflected slightly differently): weak-spirited.

it.

¶6 [37] Accordingly, for faith—and not mock-assent—to be prized, and for the highest powers to retain the imperium best and not be compelled to yield to the seditious, freedom of judgment is necessarily to be granted, and human beings so regulated that, although they openly think different and contrary things, they might still live harmoniously.

2 Nor can we doubt that this plan of commanding is best and suffers fewer disadvantages—inasmuch as it agrees most with the nature of human beings.

3 [38] For we have shown[30] that, in a democratic imperium (which most approximates the natural state), everyone compacts to act—though not to judge or reason—by a common decree. That is, since human beings cannot all think the same things equally, they have compacted that what has the most votes has the force of a decree, meanwhile keeping the authority to repeal it when they see something better. The less the freedom to judge is granted to human beings, therefore, the more an imperium is withdrawn from the most natural state and, consequently, the more repressively it is ruled.

4 [39] For it to be further established, moreover, that no disadvantages arise from this freedom which cannot be avoided solely by the authority of the highest powers, and that even if human beings openly think contrary things they are easily restrained from hurting one another by this alone, examples are readily available°. Nor do I have need to search far for them. [40] Take, for example, the city of Amsterdam, {246} which, to its considerable enhancement and with the admiration of all nations, experiences the fruits of this freedom. For in this most flourishing Republic and most outstanding city, all human beings of whatever nation and sect live with the utmost harmony; and for them to trust their goods to someone, they care to know only whether he is rich or poor and whether he usually acts in good faith or by a ruse. Otherwise, Religion or sect does not move them at all, since it does not help at all in winning or losing a cause before a judge. And no sect is so altogether hateful whose followers (provided they hurt no one and pay each what is his and live honorably) are not protected by the public authority and enforcement of the magistrates. [41] On the other hand, once when the controversy over religion between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants began to be agitated by Politicians and the Orders of the Provinces, it ultimately ended in a schism;[31] and it was established from many examples then that laws that are set down about Religion—to settle controversies—provoke rather than correct human beings; that on the basis of those laws, furthermore, other men take infinite license; that, besides, schisms do not arise on the basis of a great eagerness for truth (the wellspring of courtesy and mildness), but on the basis of a great lust to rule. [42] From these things, it is more clearly established than the light at noon that those who condemn others' writings and seditiously instigate the whining vulgar against the writers are the schismatics, rather than the writers themselves, who often only write for

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[30] See 16.5.1-6.8.

[31] These events surrounded the Synod of Dort, 1618-19. For a concise account, see Lewis S. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon, 1958), 69-75; also, Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12-14.

the learnèd and call on reason alone for help. Furthermore, those who in a free Republic still want to remove freedom of judgment, which cannot be suppressed, are really the rabble-rousers.

¶7 [43] With these things, we have shown, first,[32] that it is impossible to withhold from human beings the freedom of saying what they think.

2 Second,[33] this freedom can be granted to each in keeping with the right and authority of the highest powers, and each can preserve it in keeping with that same right, if he assumes no license from it to introduce anything into the Republic as a right or do anything against the accepted laws.

3 Third,[34] each can have this same freedom while preserving the peace of the Republic; and no disadvantages arise from it which cannot be easily controlled.

4 Fourth,[35] each can have it in keeping with piety as well.

5 Fifth,[36] laws that are set down about theoretical matters are altogether useless. **{247}**

6 [44] Sixth,[37] we have shown, finally, that not only can this freedom be granted with the peace of the Republic, piety, and the right of the highest powers preserved, but also, for preserving all these things, it has to be. For where, on the other side, one labors to withhold it from human beings, and the opinions of non-conformists—though not their spirits, which alone can sin—are called into judgment,[38] there exemplary punishments[39] are given out against honorable men° which are seen rather as martyrdoms and which provoke others and move them to pity, if not to vengeance, more than they terrify them. [45] The good arts and faith are furthermore corrupted, and flatterers and traitors are fostered and adversaries triumph, because their anger has been given in to and because they have made those who hold the imperium into sectarians of their own teaching, whose interpreters they are considered to be: from this it comes about that they dare to usurp their authority and right, and are not embarrassed to boast that they have been chosen immediately by God and that their own decrees are divine whereas those of the highest powers are, in contrast, human: on that account, they want them to yield to the divine decrees—that is, their own. No one can ignore that all these things conflict altogether with the welfare of the Republic.

7 [46] On that account, we conclude here, as in Chapter 18 above,[40] that nothing is safer for a republic than for piety and Religion to be comprehended solely in the exercise of Charity and Equity, and the right of the highest powers concerning sacred as well as profane matters° is only related to actions; otherwise, let it be granted to

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[32] See 20.1.1-3.2.
[33] See 20.3.3-4.11.
[34] See 20.4.12-13a, 16-19a.
[35] See 20.4.13b-15.
[36] See 20.4.19b-5.11.
[37] See 20.6.1-4.
[38] I.e., taken to court.
[39] Lit.: examples.
[40] See 18.4.5.

each both to think what he wants and to say what he thinks.[41]

¶8 [47] With these things, I have discharged what I had set out to do in this Treatise.

2 It remains only to admonish expressly that I have not written anything in it which I do not subject very readily to the examination and judgment of the highest Powers of my Fatherland. For if they judge that anything in what I have said conflicts with the ancestral laws or is an obstacle to the common welfare, I myself want it indicated. I know I am a human being and could have erred. Yet I have been painstakingly careful not to err, and first and foremost in that whatever I wrote would altogether answer to the laws of the fatherland, to piety, and to good morals.[42]

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[41] See note to 20.T.

[42] Or: mores.

# *SPINOZA'S ANNOTATIONS*[1]

## Annotation 1 to 1.1.3: נביא *navi*

If the third letter of the root of a verb is one of those that are called Quiescent, it is usually omitted and in its place the second letter of the root is doubled,as קָלָה when ה is omitted becomes קוֹלֵל and then קוֹל, and from נִבָּא comes נוֹבֵב; hence נִיב שפתים *language* or *speech*; thus from בזא comes בזז or בוז (בלה בלל בלעל / המה המם / שגה משגה שגג שוג).

Rashi[2] has interpreted this verb נִבָּא best. But he was badly criticized by Ibn Ezra,[3] who did not know the Hebrew language so exactly.

Besides, it is to be noted that the noun נבואה *prophecy* is universal and includes every kind of prophesying, whereas the other nouns are more specific and mostly have to do with this or that kind of prophesying, as I believe is recognized by the learned.

## Annotation 2 to 1.3.1: its propagators still cannot be called Prophets

That is, God's interpreters.

For an interpreter of God is one who interpets God's decrees to others, to whom they have not been revealed and who in embracing them rely solely on the prophet's authority.

For if human beings who hear prophets were to become prophets just as those who hear philosophers become philosophers, then the prophet would not be the interpreter of the divine decrees, since his hearers would be relying not on his attestation and authority, but on the revelation itself and on inward attestation.

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[1] Here I have by and large followed the text established by Akkerman in Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus/Traité théologico-politique*, 654-95. Except where otherwise noted, Akkerman eliminates the Latin, French and Dutch passages that Gebhardt interpolates from manuscripts, editions and translations of Spinoza's near-contemporaries. Cf. Gebhardt's editorial remarks in Spinoza, *Opera*, III, 382-420, with Akkerman's, 28-37. Interpolations may be found in (or as) A.15, 20, 21, and 27, and are indicated by angular brackets.

[2] Lit.: Rabbi Shlomo Jarchi. "The word 'Jarchi,' the result of a confusion, was widely used in the 17th century to designate Rashi." (Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 785, n. 1.) See note on "Rashi" at 10.2.49. Rashi on Ex. 7:1 associates נבואה ("prophecy") with ניב ("utterance") in Is. 57:19 and ינוב ("utters") in Prov. 10:31, and with the French word *prédicar* ("preacher").

[3] Ibn Ezra on Ex. 7:1.

Thus, the highest powers are the interpreters of the right of their imperium, since the laws given[4] by them are defended solely by the authority of the same highest powers and rely solely on their attestation. {252}

**Annotation 3 to 1.21.2: than that the Prophets had a special virtue above the common**

Although some human beings do have some things that nature has not imparted to others, still they are not said to exceed human nature unless what they specifically have is such as to be unable to be perceived from the definition of human nature.

For example, a giant's size is rare, and yet it is human.

It is given to few to compose lyrics extemporaneously, moreover, and nevertheless it is human—as also is someone's imagining some things with his eyes open as vividly as if he had them in front of him.

Yet if there were someone who had another means of perceiving and other foundations of knowledge, surely he would transcend the limits of human nature.

**Annotation 4 to 3.5.3: Patriarchs**

In Gen. 15, it is narrated that God said to Abraham that he was his defender and would give him a very full reward. To these things, Abraham said that there was nothing that could be of any importance to look forward to, since, being already in advanced old-age, he was childless.

**Annotation 5 to 3.5.5: security of life**

That observing the commandents of the Old Testament is not enough for eternal life is obvious from Mk. 10:21.

**Annotation 6 to 6.1.21: Since God's existence is not self-evident**

We have doubts about God's existence—and consequently about everything—so long as we have an idea of God himself that is not clear and distinct, but confused.

For, as one who does not correctly recognize the nature of a triangle is unaware that its three angles are equal to two right angles, so one who conceives the divine nature confusedly does not see that it pertains to God's nature to exist.

Yet for God's nature to be able to be conceived clearly and distinctly by us {253}, it is necessary that we pay attention to some very simple notions that they call common, and that we chain those that pertain to the divine nature together with them; and only then does it become transparent to us that God necessarily exists and is everywhere, and at the same time it appears that everything we perceive

[4] Lit.. borne. See note to 8.1 4.

involves God's nature in it and is conceived through it and, finally, that everything is true which we conceive adequately.

But about these things, see the Prologue to the book whose title is *Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometrical Manner.*[5]

**Annotation 7 to 7.5.37: that it is impossible to discover such a method**

To those of us who are not accustomed to this language and lack its phraseology.

**Annotation 8 to 7.11.7: concept**

By penetrable[6] things, I understand not only those that are legitimately demonstrated, but also those that we are used to embracing with a moral certainty, even if they can never be demonstrated.

Euclid's propositions are perceived[7] by anyone before they are demonstrated.

So too, histories[8] of matters both future and past which do not exceed human credibility,[9] such as rights, institutions, and morals,[10] I call penetrable, even if they cannot be demonstrated mathematically.

On the other hand, hieroglyphics and histories that seem to exceed all credibility are, I say, impenetrable, and still, many of these are given which can be investigated by our method so that we might perceive the mind of their author.

**Annotation 9 to 8.1.20: Mount Moriah**

Namely, by the historian, not by Abraham. For it says that the place of which it is said nowadays, *in the mountain of God it will be revealed*, had been called by Abraham *God will provide.*[11] **{254}**

**Annotation 10 to 8.1.40: subdued**

From this time until Jehoram's reign, when they seceded from it (II Ki. 8:20), the Edomites did not have kings; but governors appointed by the Judeans[12] filled the place of kings (see I Ki. 22:48). And therefore the Edomite governor is called *king* (II Ki. 3:9).

Whether the last king of the Edomites began to rule before Saul was created king,

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[5] I.e , Spinoza, *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, Prologue (trans. Britan, 11-20).

[6] Lit.: perceivable. Likewise later in A.8. See Glossary, s.v "perception."

[7] See Glossary, s.v. "perception."

[8] Or: stories. Likewise later in A.8.

[9] Lit.: faith. Likewise in the next sentence.

[10] Or: mores.

[11] Or. foresee Gen. 2·14.

[12] Or: Jews.

however, or whether in truth Scripture in this chapter of Genesis meant to treat as kings only those who died unconquered, can be ambiguous.

Other than that°, those[13] who want to refer Moses—who divinely instituted an imperium for the Hebrews which was altogether abhorrent to a monarchic one—to the list of the Hebrews' kings, plainly trifle.

### Annotation 11 to 9.1.6: excepted

For example, in II Ki. 18:20, one reads in the second person אָמַרְתָּ *You have said it, but as far as the mouth goes, etc.*; Is. 36:5, however, is אָמַרְתִּי *I have said it: certainly they are words; the need in war is for counsel and courage.*

Furthermore, in II Ki. 18:22 one reads וְכִי תֹאמְרוּן *but perhaps you will say*, in the plural, which is found in the singular in the manuscript of Isaiah.

Besides, in the text of Isaiah these words (from II Ki. 18:32) אֶרֶץ זֵית יִצְהָר וּדְבַשׁ וִחְיוּ וְלֹא תָמֻתוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־חִזְקִיָּהוּ are not read; and many other variant readings are found in this mode, from which no one will determine which are to be chosen in preference to others.

### Annotation 12 to 9.1.8: miraculously changed

For example, in II Sam. 7:6 one reads וָאֶהְיֶה מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּאֹהֶל וּבְמִשְׁכָּן *and I have continually wandered with the tent and the tabernacle*; in I Chr. 17:5, however, וָאֶהְיֶה מֵאֹהֶל אֶל-אֹהֶל וּמִמִּשְׁכָּן *and I have been from tent to tent and from tabernacle*—that is to say, מִתְהַלֵּךְ having been changed into מֵאֹהֶל, בְּאֹהֶל into אֶל-אֹהֶל, and בְּמִשְׁכָּן into מִמִּשְׁכָּן.

Furthermore, in II Sam. 7:10, לְעַנּוֹתוֹ *to afflict him*, is read; and in I Chr. 17:9 לְבַלֹּתוֹ {255} *to pulverize him.*

And anyone who plainly is not blind or insane and will read these chapters once will observe many discrepancies in this mode, and others of greater importance.

### Annotation 13 to 9.1.13: this time is necessarily in reference to another

That this text has to do with no other time than when Joseph was sold, not only is established from the context of his speech, but also is gathered from the very age of Judah, who was twenty-two years old° at most at that time, if one is permitted to calculate from the preceding history[14] of him.

For it appears from the last verse of Gen. 29 that Judah was born in the tenth year after the patriarch Jacob began to serve Laban, and Joseph in the fourteenth.

Accordingly, since Joseph himself, when he was sold, was seventeen years of age,

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[13] Cf. Philo, *Life of Moses* I.60-64, II. 1-7.

[14] Or: story.

Judah at that time was twenty-one, no more.

Therefore, those who believe that this long absence of Judah's from home happened before the sale of Joseph, are eager to flatter themselves and are more worried about Scripture's divinity than they are certain about it.

**Annotation 14 to 9.1.19: and on the other hand, Dinah was scarcely seven years old°**

For what some deem—that Jacob wandered between Mesopotamia and Beth El for 8 to 10 years—smells of stupidity, as I would say, *pace* Ibn Ezra.[15]

For he hurried as much as he could, not only on account of the desire—by which he was without a doubt bound—of seeing parents who were of a very advanced age, but also to discharge an oath (see Gen. 28:20 and 31:13).

Still, if these things seem conjectures rather than reasons, let us grant that Jacob spent 8 or 10 years—or even more, if you like {256}—in this brief trip, in a fate worse than Ulysses'.

Certainly they cannot deny that Benjamin was born in the last year of this wandering, that is, by their hypothesis, in the fifteenth or sixteenth year after the birth of Joseph or thereabouts.

For Jacob said farewell to Laban in the seventh year after the birth of Joseph.

Yet from Joseph's 17th year of age up to the year that the patriarch went away into Egypt, not more than twenty-two years are enumerated, as we have shown in this very Chapter.[16] And so Benjamin at that time—when he set out for Egypt—was twenty-three or twenty-four years, tops, at which flourishing of age it turns out he had grandchildren (see Gen. 46:21; cf. Num. 26:38-40 and I Chr. 8:1ff.).

Surely this is no less alien to reason than stating that a seven-year-old Dinah was raped, and the other things we have deduced from the order of this history.[17]

And so it appears that when inexperienced human beings are eager to untie knots, they fall into others, and tangle and rip the matter more.

**Annotation 15 to 9.1.24: begins to narrate**

<That is to say, in other terms and in an order which are not found in the Book of Joshua.>

**Annotation 16 to 9.1.29: Othniel, son of Kenaz, judged**

[15] Ibn Ezra on Gen. 33:20.

[16] See 9.1.14.

[17] Or: story.

Rabbi Levi ben Gerson and others[18] believe that these forty years, which Scripture says were passed in freedom, still take their beginning from the death of Joshua; and so they comprehend in the same time the 8 preceding years, in which the populace were under the jurisdiction[19] of Cushan Rishataim; and they also bring the 18 following years into the count of 80 years in which Ehud and Shamgar judged; and so they believe that the remaining years of servitude are always comprehended in those that Scripture attests to have been passed in freedom.

But since Scripture expressly enumerates how many years **{257}** the Hebrews were in servitude and how many in freedom, and Josh. 2:18 expressly narrates that the Hebrews' affairs always flourished while the judges were alive, it appears altogether that, while that Rabbi, an otherwise very erudite man, and the others who follow his footsteps are eager to untie such knots, they are correcting Scripture rather than explaining it.

This they also do who state that, in that common computation of years, Scripture meant to indicate only the times of the Jewish polity, whereas it could not bring into the common count of years those of anarchies and servitudes, to the extent that they were tantamount to disasters and interregnums.

For Scripture usually passes over the times of anarchy in silence, but does deal with the years of servitude as well as those of freedom, and does not usually expunge annals, as they dream it does.

That Ezra in I Ki.[20] wanted to comprehend absolutely all the years from the exodus from Egypt in that common number of years, is so manifest a matter that no one who is an expert in Scripture will ever waver about it.

For, if I might now omit the words of that text, David's Genealogy itself, which is dealt with at the end of the Book of Ruth[21] and in I Chr. 2,[22] scarcely allows for so great a sum of years.

For Nachshon was a prince of the tribe of Judah in the 2nd year after the Exodus from Egypt (see Num. 7:11-12), and so he died in the desert and his son Salmon crossed the Jordan with Joshua.

Yet in accordance with that Genealogy of David, that Salmon was David's great-great-grandfather.[23] **{258}**

If we subtract from this sum of 480 years the 4 of Solomon's reign and the 70 of David's life and the 40 that were passed in the desert, it will be found that David was born in the 366th year after the crossing of the Jordan; and so it is necessary

[18] Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gerson, a.k.a. Gersonides) on Jud. 3:9, 11, 12, 30, 31; Metsudat David on Jud. 3:30.

[19] The Latin is *ditio.* See Index of Terms, s.v. "right."

[20] I Ki. 6:1.

[21] Ruth 4:18-22.

[22] I Chr. 2:9-15

[23] Ruth 4:21, I Chr. 2:11-15.

that his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather begat sons when each was in his 90th year.

**Annotation 17 to 9.1.29: Samson judged**

Samson was born after the Philistines had subjugated the Hebrews.

**Annotation 18 to 9.1.56: we can**

Otherwise they are correcting rather than explaining Scripture's words.

**Annotation 19 to 9.1.64: namely, Kiriat Jearim**

Kiriat Jearim is also called Baal Judah; hence Kimchi and others[24] deem that Baalei Judah, which I have translated here *from the populace of Judah*;[25] {259} is the name of a town. But they are duped, since בַּעֲלֵי is plural in number.

Furthermore, if this text of Samuel is compared with the one in I Chr.,[26] we will see that David did not arise and leave Baal, but went there.

For if the author of II Sam. was eager to indicate at least the place David took the ark from, then, as he was speaking Hebraically, he would have said it thus: *And David arose and set out, etc., from Baal Judah, and he took the ark of God hence.*

**Annotation 20 to 9.1.64: *and stayed there three years***

<Those who meddle with commenting on this Text have corrected it in this way°: *and Absalom fled and hid at Ptolemy's, son of Amihud, King of Gesher, where he stayed three years, and David wept for his son all the time he was at Gesher.*[27]

<But if that is what they call interpreting, and if it is permitted to indulge in this license in expounding Scripture and to alter phrases completely, whether by adding to them or withholding something from them, I confess that it is permitted to corrupt Scripture and give to it as many forms as one wanted, as to a piece of wax.>

**Annotation 21 to 10.1.2: perhaps after Judah Maccabee restored the temple**

This suspicion arises—if indeed what is certain can be called a suspicion—from the derivation of the genealogy of King Jeconiah which is handed down in I Chr. 3[28] and extends to the sons of Elioenai, who was the thirteenth from him; and it is

[24] Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi) on II Sam. 6:2, Metsudat David on *idem*, Perush Rabbi Yoshia on *idem*.

[25] Actually, Spinoza's translation of II Sam. 6:2 in 9.1.63 omits the words *the populace of*.

[26] I.e., II Sam 6:2, with I Chr. 13:5.

[27] Ralbag on II Sam. 13:37.

[28] I Chr. 3:17-24

to be noted that when that Jeconiah was thrown into chains, he did not have any sons; but it seems that he begat sons in prison, so far as one is permitted to conjecture from the names he gave them.

Yet he seems to have had grandsons—again, so far as one is permitted to conjecture from their names—after he was freed from prison; and therefore פדיה *Pedaiah* (which signifies *God has freed*), who in this chapter is said **{260}** to have been <the father of Zerubabel, was born> in the 37th or 38th year of Jeconiah's captivity, that is, 33 years before King Cyrus granted the Jews a pardon; and consequently Zerubabel, whom Cyrus placed over the Jews, seems to have been 13 or 14 years of age at most.

But I would rather have passed over these matters in silence, in view of causes that the seriousness of the time do not let me explain.

But it is enough to indicate the matter to the prudent.

Those who want to run through with some attention this entire progeny of Jeconiah's which is handed down in I Chr. 3:17 up to the end of the chapter, and to compare the Hebrew text with the version that is said in the Septuagint, will be able to see with no effort that these books were restored after the second restoration of the city[29] made by Judah Maccabee: Jeconiah's descendants lost the principate at this time, not before.

## Annotation 22 to 10.1.27: was led

And so no one could have suspected that his prophecy contradicted Jeremiah's prediction, as everyone suspected from Josephus' narrative[30] until they knew from the outcome of the matter that both had predicted true things.

## Annotation 23 to 10.2.17: Nehemiah

The historian himself testifies in 1:1 that the greatest part of this book is taken over from the book that Nehemiah himself wrote.

But there is no doubt that what is narrated from chapter 8 up to 12:6—and the last two verses of chapter 12 besides,[31] which are inserted in a parentheses in Nehemiah's words—is added by the historian himself, who lived after Nehemiah.

## Annotation 24 to 10.2.24: Ezra

Ezra was the uncle of Joshua, the first high pontiff (see Ezra 7:1 and I Chr. 6:13-15), and set out from Babylon for Jerusalem at the same time as Zerubabel (see Neh. 12:1).

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[29] I.e , of Jerusalem.

[30] I.e., *Antiquities* X.7.106. See 10.1.27.

[31] I.e., Neh. 12:46-47.

But it seems that, when he saw that the Jews'[32] affairs were in disarray, he made for Babylon {261} once again—which others also did, as is plain from Neh. 1:2. And he remained there up to the reign of Artaxerxes, until, once the things he had wanted were obtained, he made for Jerusalem a second time.

Nehemiah also made for Jerusalem with Zerubabel at the time of Cyrus. See Ezra 2:2 and 63; compare with Neh. 10:9 and 10:1.

For that interpreters translate **התרשתא** *Hatirshata* as *envoy* is not proved by any manuscript, whereas, on the contrary, it is certain that new names had to have been imposed on Jews who frequented the court.

Thus Daniel was called Balteshazzar, Zerubabel was called Sheshbazzar (see Dan. 1:7, Ezra 1:8 and 5:14), and Nehemiah was called Hatirshata.

Yet by reason of his office,[33] he was usually hailed as פֶּחָה, *procurator* or *governor.* See Neh. 5:14 and 12:26.

**Annotation 25 to 10.2.54: there was no canon of Sacred Books before the time of the Maccabees**

What is called the Great Synagogue did not have its beginning until after Asia was subjected to the Macedonians.

What Maimonides,[34] Rabbi Abraham ben David,[35] and others state, however, that the presidents of this council were Ezra, Daniel, Nehamiah, Haggai, Zechariah, et al., stands on no other foundation than rabbinic tradition—which treats the Persians' reign as having stood for 43 years, no more.

Nor can they prove by any other reason that the decrees of that Great Synagogue, or Synod, which was composed of Pharisees alone, were received from Prophets who had received them from other Prophets, and so on back to Moses, who had received them from God and handed them down to posterity by mouth, not in writing.

But the Pharisees believe these things with their usual stubbornness. Prudent men°, however, who know the causes of the councils and synods and at the same time the controversies between the Pharisees and the Saduccees, could easily

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[32] Or: Judeans'. Likewise two sentences later in this Annotation.

[33] Elsewhere: duty.

[34] Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer HaMada*, Introduction (*The Book of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. M. Hyamson [Jerusalem: Boys Town, 1965], 2a).

[35] Rabbi Abraham ben David's *Hassagot HaRabad* ("Rabad's Notes [or Criticisms]," so titled in keeping with his rabbinic acronym and routinely interspersed in editions of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*) offer no comment or criticism on this point; perhaps Spinoza is inferring Rabad's putative agreement with Maimonides here from his silence (cf. *Mishneh Torah leHaRav Rabeynu Mosheh b. R. Maimon z"l* [2 vols.; New York: Binah, 5707 (= 1946-47)], 3). Or perhaps, and more likely, Spinoza is referring to Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer HaKabalah* ("The Book of Tradition," 1161), which endorses the rabbinic tradition in question as a matter of course (see the translator's note *ad loc.* in Baruch Spinoza, *Ma'amar Theologi-Madini*, tr. Ch. Wirszubski [Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1961], 231, n. 21).

conjecture the causes for convoking that Great Synagogue or Council.

This is certain: **{262}** no Prophets were present on that council, and the Pharisees' decrees, which they call traditions, received their authority from that same Council.

### Annotation 26 to 11.1.6: *we adjudge*

Interpreters translate **λογίζομαι** in this passage[36] as *I conclude*, and they contend that it was usurped in some mode by Paul for **συλλογίζομαι,** even though **λογίζομαι** in Greek would mean the same as **חשב** in Hebrew—*to compute, to be thinking, to figure*: in this signification, it agrees very well with the Syriac text.

For the Syriac translation, if indeed it is a translation—which can be doubted, since we do not know the translator, nor the time when it was translated, and the Apostles' vernacular language was none other than Syriac—translates this text of Paul's as follows: **ܡܬܪܥܝܢܢ ܗܟܝܠ** *metra'enan hakhil*, which Tremellius[37] translates very well as *therefore we adjudge*.[38]

For the noun **ܪܥܝܢܐ** *re'yono,* which is formed from this verb, signifies *adjudication*; for **ܪܥܝܢܐ** in Hebrew is **רְעוּתָה** *re'utah, will.* Therefore, **ܡܬܪܥܝܢܢ** is *we want* or *we adjudge.*

### Annotation 27 to 11.1.47: as does Christ's whole teaching

<That is to say, the one that Jesus Christ had taught on the mountain and that Saint Matthew mentions in chapter 5 and following.>

### Annotation 28 to 15.1.8: whatever Scripture teaches dogmatically

See Lodewijk Meyer°,[39] *Philosophy, the Interpreter of Sacred Scripture*, p. 75.[40]

### Annotation 29 to 15.1.30: Namely, Samuel

*Philosophy, the Interpreter of Sacred Scripture*, p. 76.[41] **{263}**

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[36] I.e., Rom. 8:18. See 11.1.6.

[37] See note to 4.4.46.

[38] More or less lit.: For the Syriac rendering [*versio*], if indeed it is a rendering—which can be doubted, since we do not know the interpreter [*interpretem*] nor the time when it was spread [*vulgata*], and the Apostles' vernacular language was none other than Syriac—renders [*vertit*] this text of Paul's thus: ܡܬܪܥܝܢܢ ܗܟܝܠ *metra'enan hakhil*, which Tremellius renders best as *therefore we adjudge*.

[39] Here and in the next two Annotations, Spinoza omits the name of the author, although or because the book in question, *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (Amsterdam, 1666), was subsequently printed together with Spinoza's *Treatise* in the latter's second and third editions

[40] Lit.: *Interp. Script.*, p. 75. The pages cited are to the original edition of Meyer's book. See the recent French translation, Louis Meyer, *La philosophie, interprète de l'Écriture Sainte,* trans J. Lagrée and P. F. Moreau (Paris: Intertexte, 1988), 174.

[41] Lit.: *Interp. Script.*, p. 76 The pages cited are to the original edition of Meyer's book. See *La philosophie, interprète de l'Écriture Sainte,* 176

**Annotation 30 to 15.1.65: I want to admonish here expressly**

*Philosophy, the Interpreter of Sacred Scripture*, p. 115.[42]

**Annotation 31 to 15.1.66: that simple obedience is the way of salvation**

That is, reason cannot teach that it is enough for salvation or blessedness to embrace the divine decrees as rights or commands, and that there is no need to conceive them as eternal truths; but revelation can, as is plain from what is demonstrated in Ch. 4.

**Annotation 32 to 16.5.9: will promise without a ruse**

In the civil state, where what is good and evil is decreed by the common jurisdiction, ruses[43] are correctly distinguished into good ones and evil ones.

But in the natural state, where each is his own judge and has the highest right to prescribe laws for himself, to interpret them, and even to abrogate them according as he judges it useful for himself, here, surely, it cannot be conceived that anyone acts with an evil ruse.

**Annotation 33 to 16.6.12: for there each can be free whenever he likes**

In whatever city a human being may be, he can be free.

For certainly a human being is free to the extent that he is guided by reason.

Yet (n.b., Hobbes notwithstanding)[44] reason altogether urges peace; this cannot be obtained, however, unless the common rights of the city are kept inviolate.

Therefore, the more a human being is led by reason, that is, the more he is free, the more steadfastly he will keep the city's rights and execute the commands of the highest power whose subject he is. **{264}**

**Annotation 34 to 16.8.3: For no one knows on the basis of nature**

In saying that human beings are without escape, Paul speaks in a human manner.

For in ch. 9 of the same epistle,[45] he expressly teaches that God pities whom he wants, and hardens whom he wants; and human beings are inexcusable from no other cause than that they are in the power of God as clay in the hands of the

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[42] Lit. *Interp. Script.*, p. 115. The pages cited are to the original edition of Meyer's book. See *La philosophie, interprète de l'Écriture Sainte,* 244-48.

[43] Lit.: a ruse.

[44] Cf. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ch 2, ¶¶1-2 (esp. ¶1n), with ch. I, ¶¶ 2-7 (Latin version, ed H. Warrender [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 99-100, 90-94; English version, ed. H. Warrender [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 51-53, 42-47).

[45] Rom 9:18.

potter, who from the same lump makes one for glory, another for shame,[46] and not on account of their having been forewarned.

As for what touches on the natural divine law, however, whose highest precept we have said to be to love God,[47] I have called it a law in the same sense that the philosophers call the common rules of nature acording to which everything comes about, laws.

For love of God is not obedience, but a virtue that is necessarily in human beings who know God correctly.

Yet obedience has to do with the will of the one commanding, not with the necessity and truth of the matter.

Since, however, we are ignorant of the nature of God's will, and on the contrary we know[48] for certain that whatever comes about, comes about by God's power[49] alone, we can never know whether God wants to be worshiped by human beings as a prince—by some honor—except by revelation.

Add that we have shown[50] that the divine rights are seen by us as rights or things instituted so long as we are ignorant of their causes; once this is known, however, they then cease to be rights, and we embrace them as eternal truths, not as rights: that is, obedience then goes over into a love that arises from true knowledge, as light from the sun.

From reason's guidance, therefore, we can love God, but we cannot obey him, since by reason we cannot embrace the divine rights as divine so long as we are ignorant of their cause, nor conceive God who constitutes rights as a prince.

### Annotation 35 to 17.1.3: so as to be able to do nothing afterward

Two comrades-in-arms undertook to transfer the imperium to the Roman people, and transferred it°.

Tacitus, *Histories* I.[51] **{265}**

### Annotation 36 to 17.5.5: (see Num. 11:28)

In this passage, two men are accused of prophesying in the camp, and Joshua suggests they should be arrested: this he would not have done if anyone were permitted to give a divine answer to the populace without Moses' bidding.

Yet Moses was pleased to absolve the guilty and criticized Joshua for urging him

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[46] Rom. 9:21.

[47] See 4.4.2.

[48] Here "know" is *scire*, in contrast to *cognoscere* (as elsewhere in A.34.) See note on "know" at P.1.3.

[49] Here "power" is *potentia*, rather than *potestas* (as earlier in A.34). See note on "power" at P.5.14.

[50] Cf. 4.4.12, 14-31.

[51] *Histories* I.25.2.

to pursue his royal right at that time, when the tedium of ruling bound him so much that he preferred dying to ruling alone, as is obvious from vs. 14 of the same chapter.

For he answered Joshua as follows: *Are you hot with anger because of me? If only every one of God's populace were a Prophet*;[52] that is, *If only the right to consult God would revert to them, so that the kingdom would be within the populace themselves.*

Joshua, accordingly, was ignorant, not of the right but of the timing;[53] and therefore he was chastised by Moses, just as Abishai was by David when he admonished the king to condemn to death Shimei, who was certainly guilty of treason; see II Sam. 19:22-23.

**Annotation 37 to 17.5.11: On this matter, see Numbers 27:21.**

Interpreters (those I happen to have seen) have translated vss. 19 and 23 of this chapter badly.

For vss. 19 and 23 do not signify that he has given him precepts or has instructed him with precepts, but that he has created or consitituted Joshua as prince: this is frequent in Scripture, as in Ex. 18:23, I Sam. 13:14, Josh. 1:9, and I Sam. 25:30, etc. **{266}**

**Annotation 38 to 17.5.28: Nor was he bound to acknowledge any other judge besides God.**

The Rabbis fantasize that what is vulgarly called the Great Sanhedrin was instituted by Moses; nor are the Rabbis alone, but there are many among the Christians who are as inept as the Rabbis.

Moses did choose 70 assistants for himself to take care of the republic with him, since he had not been able to endure the burden of the whole populace;[54] but he never gave any law about instituting a council of seventy men, but on the contrary he bade each tribe to constitute judges in the cities that God had given to them, to settle lawsuits following the laws given by him; and if it were to happen that the judges themselves were in doubt about right, they would go to the high pontiff (who was the highest interpreter of the laws) or to the judge to whom they were subordinate at the time (for he had the right to consult the pontiff) to settle the issue with the explanation of the pontiff.

For if it were to happen that a subordinate judge contended that he was not bound to bring a sentence on the basis of the mind of the high pontiff which he received from him or from the highest power, he was condemned to death, namely, by the

52 Num:11:14.

53 Lit.: but of the plan of the time.

54 Ex. 18:13-26, 24:1.

highest judge—whoever he was at the time—by {267} whom the subordinate judge had been constituted; see Dt. 17:9.

Viz., it would be either the commander-in-chief of the whole Israelite populace, such as Joshua, or a prince of one of the tribes—in whose possession after the division was made was the right to consult the pontiff about the affairs of his tribe, to decree war and peace, to fortify cities, to constitute judges, etc.—or a king to whom all or some of the tribes had transferred their right.

To confirm this as true, I could bring up many attestations from the histories; but out of many I will bring up one, which seems the chief one.

When the Shilonite Prophet chose Jeroboam to be king,[55] by the same token he gave him the right to consult the pontiff and constitute judges; and absolutely all the right that Rehoboam retained over the two tribes, Jeroboam obtained[56] over the ten tribes.

Therefore, by the same right by which Jehoshaphat could constitute the highest council of his imperium at Jerusalem (see II Chr. 19:8ff.), Jeroboam could do the same in his court.

For it is certain that, insofar as he was king by the command of God, Jeroboam and consequently his subjects, not being Rehoboam's subjects, were not bound by the law of Moses to stand before him as judge, and much less before the judiciary[57] constituted by Rehoboam in Jerusalem and subordinate to him.

Just as the Hebrews' imperium was divided, therefore, there were as many supreme councils in it.

Those, in truth, who do not pay attention to the varied state of the Hebrews but confuse their different states as[58] one, are entangled in many modes.

### Annotation 39 to 19.3.16: and acting against him by right

Here attention is to be paid first and foremost to the things we said about right in Ch. 16.

[55] I Ki. 11:29-39.

[56] Lit.: obtained it all.

[57] Lit.: judgment.

[58] Lit.: into

# *GLOSSARY*

*Preliminary Note*: Many of Spinoza's key terms are deliberately ambiguous. At the outset of the *Treatise*, they seem to have a traditional or commonsense meaning, especially those relating to theological and moral matters. But as the *Treatise*'s argument moves along, theology and morality are gradually shown to be a function of politics—or rather of what Spinoza understands politics to be, which we today might offhand call power politics. So the meanings of his key terms appear to shift in that direction, and their new, untraditional meanings come to the surface as features or carriers of his overall argument. Inasmuch as the shift is intended by Spinoza, we might say that the terms in question are like new wine in old bottles that still bear their original labels along with traces of their original contents. Wherever I could not find a single English equivalent to convey the *Treatise*'s internal recycling of a given term, I have tried—not always successfully—to translate the first occurrence of that term so as to give priority to its old-fashioned exterior and let the new meaning that Spinoza has poured into it emerge in due course. Here and there I supply a term's alternate meaning repeatedly in my translator's footnotes, as if to acknowledge the ongoing abruptness, or reverberating shock, a reader may experience as he or she discovers more than once that the term's new meaning jars or conflicts with its old one even though both meanings were somehow present all along. In the Glossary that follows, I sometimes indicate where an unsettled semantic conflict within the same word may well serve the purposes of Spinoza's larger argument; but I leave the reader to draw the fuller implications on his or her own with the possible help of the Interpretive Essay and, of course, the translation itself. Since I refer in the Glossary to only a sample of instances of a given word for purposes of illustrating its full range of meaning, I have located all the instances of that word and others in an Index of Terms, for the reader's further consideration.

The following list of entries might have been perhaps shorter, perhaps longer. Even so, each term listed has seemed to me to be worthy of the attention I have given it, and more. As regards some terms that also deserve attention but have not made the list (lest it grow into a volume of its own), I have supplied brief comments in my translator's footnotes, usually at the first occurrence of the term in question.

### certain, reliable (*certus*)

Both the importance and the ambiguity of the term "certain" are evident from the *Treatise*'s opening sentence. Spinoza speaks of the need for "certain" counsel—or, alternatively, unfailing good luck—as needed for human beings to free themselves from the grip of superstition (P.1.1). Is he speaking here about advice that is "certain" in the sense of sure-fire, or instead about advice that is "certain" in the sense of not yet specified, or what? This ambiguity permeates the *Treatise*. On the one hand, the

possibly sure-fire advice the *Treatise* ends up giving may be summarized as liberal religion (including modern-scientific biblical criticism) and liberal democracy (cf. 20.7.1-7). On the other hand, and perhaps even more basically, the initially unspecified advice the *Treatise* also gives has to do with opening up human beings to minds like its author's, i.e., to philosophical or scientific minds. Such minds are obviously the source of possibly sure-fire advice like liberal religion and liberal democracy, but they are also something in their own right; and the *Treatise* aims at both protecting them, by advocating political tolerance, and encouraging them among its own readership, by offering a timely argument that both attracts readers' philosophical attention and enhances their powers of observation and analysis.

Perhaps, then, the gap between these two possible meanings of "certain" is not a blemish in the *Treatise*'s argument, but among its attractive features. Spinoza seems to have wanted readers to notice the ambiguity, be drawn to it, and experiment in their own minds as necessary in order to resolve it whenever it recurs, by examining the implications one way or the other. Admittedly, he usually means by "certain" sure-fire, or assured; but not always, as the following representative example shows. He says that reason and experience teach no more "certain" means for living securely and avoiding the wrongdoings inflicted by others, than forming a society with "certain" laws and occupying a "certain" area of the world, etc. (3.4.5). Perhaps, say, the laws here are said to be "certain" in that they are secure, i.e., well-established and well-enforced. But then again, while the apparent context of Spinoza's remark is biblical, the *Treatise*'s final view is that the most secure laws are those of a liberal democracy. Might not liberal-democratic laws then be the "certain"—either sure-fire or as yet unspecified—laws that Spinoza at bottom has in mind here? Stumbling onto this last possibility might well lead a reader to wonder how the biblical and other matters under discussion at the moment will compare with those still to be discussed, and ponder the alternatives and their larger implications as they unfold, by asking, Which way of conceiving society is the "certain" (sure-fire? to be specified?) one to which we should look for guidance, the Bible's or some other way?

On more than one occasion, I have had to cover over a possibly instructive ambiguity for the sake of English idiom. Spinoza speaks repeatedly of possibly appealing to a "reliable" tradition to certify the Bible's meaning on a disputed point (2.7.2; 7.5.23; cf. 7.11.14). As I indicate each time in a footnote, the actual term is "certain" (or the corresponding adverb): if it were to mean an unspecified tradition, it could well imply that the tradition in question may never, unfortunately, have been able to answer reliably to that appeal as such, but was simply a tradition that was in place—say, the Pharisaic tradition—and was merely believed by its adherents to be reliable (cf. 9.1.77). However that may be, Spinoza leaves it to the reader to examine the implications either way in each case.

**counsel (*consilium*)**

Like the term "certain," the term "counsel" occurs prominently in the *Treatise*'s opening sentence, which speaks of the need for "certain counsel"—or else unfailing good luck—as needed for human beings to free themselves from superstition (P.1.1).

"Counsel" itself is ambiguous at least some of the time. The ambiguity is compounded when Spinoza uses the two terms in their ambiguous meaning side by side (as in P.1.1).

As for "counsel" itself, its ambiguity becomes evident once the reader stops to consider whether, in speaking of the "counsel" that is the certain corrective for superstition, Spinoza means the content of that counsel (ultimately, liberal religion and liberal democracy; cf. the previous entry) or the mere openness to counsel (ultimately, that of philosophical or scientific minds; cf. *ibid.*). Spinoza's first sentence by itself makes it hard to decide. That he means the content primarily is evident in most, though not all subsequent instances. A striking exception occurs when he says that Is. 11:2 speaks of the virtue or force of "counsel," as well as of wisdom and strength (1.17.17, 20.6); in Spinoza's reading, Isaiah seems to have in mind the general effects of counsel rather than any particular counsel, etc., though admittedly the effects may also be understood to depend on the particulars. Again, referring to the Pharisees' council that decided which biblical books were to be canonized and which were not, Spinoza says that whoever wants to be certain of the authority of all the biblical books should take "counsel" once more and investigate the reason for each (10.2.61); presumably he means that whoever wants that certainty should either deliberate on his own or else be open to the advice of someone like, say, Spinoza himself—though conceivably he could mean the particular advice as well. Further, Alexander the Great's wanting to be hailed as Jove's son is said to have been done on "counsel" rather than out of pride (17.3.12); Spinoza's initial emphasis here seems to be on Alexander's openness to counsel, although he goes on to indicate as well the particular counsel on which Alexander acted.

Besides the *Treatise*'s opening sentence, he pairs "certain" and "counsel" once again when saying that the rabbis mistakenly conclude that variant readings in the text of the Hebrew Bible were inserted by its original writers on "certain counsel" so as to signify profound mysteries (9.1.77, with 9.1.60, 71, 116). Apart from the ambiguity of "certain" here—which could mean either reliable or unspecified (see the previous entry)—the "counsel" in question could mean either the particulars of the advice that is said to have led the writers to insert the variants, or some further, general but unspecified advice.

**Hebrew (*Hebraeus*); Israelite (*Israelitas*); Jew, Judean (*Judaeus*)**

Spinoza speaks of "Hebrews" in reference to either the Hebrew language or the biblical nation as a nation like any other (2.9.12; 3.3.8, 5.1-2, 58; etc.). In contrast, he speaks of the (biblical) "Israelites" almost exclusively in a theological context, in connection with either God or revelation (though cf. 14.1.10). The main exception is where he speaks of the "civil war [or wars]" between the "Israelites" and the "Judeans" (5.4.12; 18.3.2-3). "Judeans" and "Jews," in turn, are the same word in Spinoza's Latin (*Judaei*). Often *Judaei* is synonymous or else parallel with either "Hebrews" or "Israelites." Often instead it means Jews as a post-biblical religious community. Often, too, it refers to more than one of the foregoing at the same time, and Spinoza leaves it to his reader to sort things out. I have preferred to translate

*Judaei* as "Jews," except where the immediate context requires "Judeans."

**imperium, empire (*imperium*); commander, emperor (*imperator*); command (*v.*) (*imperare*); command (*n.*), commandment (*mandatum*)**

In Roman law, an *imperium* is originally a military commander's administrative authority over conquered territory. Subsequently it refers to any magistrate's jurisdiction for exercising judicial and executive powers. Spinoza uses the term to refer to government, governance, sovereignty, etc., though none of these notions fits all Spinoza's instances. I have therefore retained the original Latin throughout, except occasionally where the English cognate "empire" seems more appropriate.

Spinoza stretches the term to cover not just all of political life but nature as well. He speaks of human beings apart from political society as living under the "imperium" of nature (16.2.6, 8, 3.3). At the same time, he identifies the right to rule exclusively with those who hold the highest "imperium" (16.6.1; etc.). A political imperium, then, is a possession. It is something that designated individuals hold, retain, defend, preserve, etc., or else lose (16.6.4-6, 7.5, 8, 8.20; etc.). Overall, Spinoza's argument is designed to show that political imperiums are best preserved by forgoing monarchic or aristocratic rule as practiced by pre-modern holders of imperiums, along with the superstitious religions they co-opted to strengthen their hold on those imperiums, in favor of liberal democracy and liberal religion.

In Latin, *imperium* is akin to *imperare* ("to command") and *imperator* ("commander" or "emperor"), though not to *mandatum*, which is either "commandment" or "command," depending on the immdediate context. As regards *mandatum*, much of the *Treatise*'s argument may be described as an attempt to absorb its theological meaning into its political meaning. For example, Spinoza says that after Moses' death Joshua became commander-in-chief even though he could communicate God's "commands" to the people only after first receiving them through the high pontiff, whereas after Joshua's death each tribe waged war and compacted with vanquished enemies on its own even though in doing so it went against the "commandments" (17.5.20, 30): both nouns in quotation marks are *mandatum*. Similarly, Spinoza says that inasmuch as one who cultivates justice and charity on the basis of God's "commandment" fulfils God's law, and justice and charity cannot receive the force of right and "command" except on the basis of the right of the imperium, therefore religion receives the force of right solely by the decree of those who have the right "to command" (19.1.6-7): again, both nouns are *mandatum*.

**mental cast, intellect, intelligence (*ingenium*)**

The noun *ingenium* means, literally, "inborn wit." This expression, or a related one like "native wit" or "mother wit," might well fit all Spinoza's usages in the *Treatise*, but it is no longer in fashion and I have had to search for a more updated rendering. It is roughly synonymous with "IQ" and shares in the ambiguity of that quasi-technical term in referring to a particular individual's (or society's) intellectual

aptitude, whether as something inseparably blended with his (or its) individuality or as an isolable component of that individuality. Thus, on the one hand, Spinoza speaks of letting each individual worship God according to his own "mental cast" (e.g., P.3.3) and, more generally, of an individual's (or society's) "mental cast" as something variable (P.5.13), diverse (16.8.8), or unique (17.12.29)—as when he describes this or that "mental cast" as being, e.g., womanly (2.6.4), stubborn (3.5.38, 5.3.5), or crude (5.3.3; but cf. 3.4.5). On the other hand, he also speaks of the excellence, keenness, weakness or strength of one's "intellect" (2.8.13, 5.4.2, 15, 10.2.38) and of the superiority or mediocrity of one's "intelligence" (1.20.5, 3.4.5).

Sometimes the ambiguity is strikingly hard to resolve. For example, Spinoza speaks of Abraham Ibn Ezra as being of a freer "mental cast," or intellectual disposition, than other rabbis (8.1.7); yet he could also be referring to Ibn Ezra's "intellect" as such. Again, he speaks of the anger of those who cannot bear free "intellects" (20.5.7); yet he could be referring not just to those unable to tolerate fellow human beings who think independently as a result of having developed their intelligence, but also—especially if the verb "bear" is to be understood ironically here—to those pathologically unwilling or unable to acquire a free "intellect," or perhaps "mental cast," for themselves. Finally, he also speaks of those who are punished for being of a free "mental cast" (20.5.9); yet he may at the same time be speaking of those who are punished simply for exercising their "intellect" on their own in public. In such cases, it seems safest to assume that Spinoza is aware of the ambiguity and that it perhaps furthers rather than hinders his intended argument, in calling attention to each *ingenium*'s irreducible individuality.

Since a given *ingenium*—"mental cast" or "intellect" or "intelligence"—is always someone's *ingenium*, i.e., is always individualized in keeping with the person or society to which it belongs, it differs from *intellectio* or *intellectus* or *intelligentia*—i.e., "understanding" pure and simple. Thus Spinoza speaks, e.g., of establishing the truthfulness and divinity of Scripture on the basis of an unprejudiced "understanding" of it (P.4.8), or of concluding on the basis of Scripture whether or not human "understanding" is corrupt (P.5.6), or of needing a complete "understanding" of the first twelve books of the Bible (9.1.1), respectively. For the sake of English idiom, though at the occasional risk of confusion with the aforementioned *ingenium*, I have had to translate the adjective *intellectualis* as "intellectual." Thus Spinoza refers, e.g., to knowledge of God arrived at by the human understanding apart from divine revelation as the strictly "intellectual" knowledge of God (4.3.3, 13.1.11, 31) and to philosophical axioms adduced by the human understanding for the purpose of self-understanding, such as those found in his own *Ethics Demonstrated in a Geometrical Order*, as "intellectual" axioms (5.4.1-2).

**mode, measure (*modus*); moderate (*v.*), modify (*moderari*); moderate (*a.*) (*moderatus*); way (*via*)**

The terms "mode" and "way" as Spinoza uses them mean more or less the same, except that the former is meant to be considerably more precise. In his *Ethics Demonstrated in a Geometrical Order*, Spinoza defines "mode" rather technically as

"the affections of substance, or that which is in another, through which the latter is also conceived" (Pt. I, Df. 5). He means that substance—which is everything that is—and what it undergoes are too vast and complicated to be understood by us all at once (or ever). We can only understand substance by being able to conceptualize it in part (cf. 1.4.1). A "mode," then, is the perspective or framework within which we make some aspect of substance understandable to ourselves by assigning concepts to it and showing the logical (or "geometrical") interconnections among those concepts, in a manner illustrated by the *Ethics* itself as a whole.

In the *Treatise*, for example, Spinoza speaks of the "mode" or "modes" by which human beings interpret nature superstitiously, i.e., project onto it anthropomorphisms or other figments of their imaginations (P.1.4, 8). He implies that we can analyze logically the mindset within which they do so, or reduce it to a system discernible to any competent outside observer—as Spinoza himself proceeds to do in Ch. 2, in his account of the imaginations of prophets (consider 2.5.3, 9.20, 25). Similarly, he speaks of the incompatibility between living in a free republic, on the one hand, and trying to control citizens' freedom of judgment in any "mode," on the other (P.3.1): he implies that the incompatibility can somehow be shown systematically; and he eventually follows through, in Ch. 20 (consider 20.1.4, 4.13, with 16.6.11).

Inasmuch as a "mode" always involves a limited perspective or frame of reference—the price we pay for being able to come to terms with things at all—I have occasionally had to translate the term as "measure," especially where Spinoza speaks of those who fail to keep their views or their behavior within proper limits. Thus he says that superstitious human beings long for the uncertain goods of fortune "without measure" (P.1.2, 5), that Ezekiel wondered "without measure" at God's glory leaving the Temple (2.7.1), and that the Israelites slaughtered the Judeans, etc., with an anger that had no "measure" (18.3.2). To keep within measure is to "be moderate" (1.20.11; 5.2.8; 20.3.2) or rather to "be moderated" (grammatically, the Latin adjective is the past participle of the verb; cf. 5.2.8; 17.7.1). Then again, Spinoza uses this same Latin verb to say that anyone who is not governed by reason wants everything to "be modified"—i.e., measured or perhaps rearranged—on the basis of his own mental cast (17.3.3).

"Way," on the other hand, keeps to its commonsense—and theological—meaning throughout the *Treatise*. An exception might be one or more instances of the theological expression "way of salvation" (1.14.5, 15.3; 7.1.1, 3; 11.1.57; 15.1.66; cf. 1.18.13), which in Spinoza's usage may turn out to have a second, strictly political meaning, commensurate with the argument of Ch. 16-20. Even so, the resulting ambiguity turns on the term "salvation" rather than "way" (see Glossary, s.v. "welfare"). Another exception might be where Spinoza speaks of the unique and certain "way" of interpreting Scripture, where the term seems synonymous with "method" in the latter's technical meaning (7.1.11; cf. 7.1.9). Perhaps; yet if so, Spinoza is at the same time accommodating his diction to the larger theological context. I should add that whereas "mode" and its cognates occur some 137 times in Spinoza's Latin, "way" occurs only 27 times, though idiomatic English has often forced me to interpolate it

in addition as "way°" (by attaching the symbol I have used for indicating interpolations; see note to P.1.2).

**on the basis of, out of, from, according to (*ex*);[1] in accordance with (*secundum*)**

The word "basis" has no separate Latin equivalent here. Instead I have used it to help translate the preposition *ex* as "on the basis of," where the usual English equivalents "out of," "from" or "according to" do not fit Spinoza's plain meaning. Such instances permeate the argument of the *Treatise*. In the Preface alone, for example, Spinoza says that political stability can be preserved "on the basis of" laws that punish seditious behavior without hurting free speech (P.3.2; cf. P.5.15), that each individual should be free to judge political matters and worship God "on the basis of" his own mental cast (P.3.3; cf. P.5.13-15), that it is doubtful whether we can conclude "on the basis of" Scripture that human understanding is corrupt (P.5.6), and that while Scripture teaches that worshiping God is identical with being devoted to justice and charity, it does so only "on the basis" of the intellectual abilities and preconceptions of the prophets' and the apostles' original addressees (P.5.15).

"On the basis of" is thus equivalent to by-means-of, by-recourse-to, or even out-of-the-material-resources-of, inasmuch as, in the instances just mentioned, laws would thereby supply the means for punishing sedition while protecting freedom, or an individual's mental cast would constitute the materials for his judging and worshiping, etc. In contrast, I have translated the preposition *secundum* as "in accordance with." Thus Spinoza says that everything happens "in accordance with" the universal laws of nature (3.3.2, etc.), i.e., in line with them, or that Abraham lived for a while "in accordance with" the rites and laws of King Melchizedek (3.5.9), i.e., in conformity with them. In these instances, Spinoza is speaking of laws of nature as the behavior patterns of everything that happens, and of Melchizedek's rites and laws as Abraham's own behavior patterns, rather than as the means or materials which make up, say, Abraham or anything else.

At the risk of complicating matters further, I have used translator's footnotes to indicate five instances where, for the sake of English idiom, I have rendered "on the basis of" (or "out of" or "from") as "according to": Spinoza speaks of how happiness depends on virtue rather than fortune "according to" Solomon (4.4.45), of Joshua's lifespan "according to" Josephus (9.1.29), of dating Ps. 88-89 "according to" Philo (10.1.7), of religion's being received by each "according to" his spirit (11.1.48), and of the Apostles' being both prophets and teachers "according to" their duty as Apostles (11.1.53). In these instances, what Spinoza is saying is that Solomon, Josephus, Philo, each individual's spirit, and the Apostles' duty are the sources—not the patterns—for the teaching about happiness, the lifespan information, the dates, the reception of religion, and the combined prophetic-and-teaching functions, respectively.

[1] This list of English equivalents is not exhaustive. E.g., at 11.1.17 *ex se ipso* is "on his own."

**perception (*perceptio*); perceive, understand (*percipere*); penetrable (*perceptibilis*); impenetrable (*imperceptibilis, impenetrabilis*); understanding (*intellectus*); understand (*intelligere*); understandable (*intelligibilis*)**

For the sake of of English idiom, I have had to translate the Latin *perceptibilis* and *imperceptibilis* (lit.: "perceivable" and "unperceivable") as "penetrable" and "impenetrable," respectively, even though the *Treatise* elsewhere also uses *impenetrabilis* ("impenetrable," 2.8.2).

Spinoza himself adds a brief annotation to the *Treatise* to explain why he prefers "penetrable" (*perceptibilis*) where we might expect "understandable" (*intelligibilis*) (A.8). "Penetrable" applies both to things that are "understandable" or demonstrable, like the propositions of Euclid, and to histories or reports of things past or future, including legal and moral matters, which are believable or plausible but not subject to mathematically rigorous demonstration. The contents of such reports, therefore, are not strictly speaking "understandable." We can at best be morally certain of them, insofar as we see no reason offhand to disbelieve them. On the other hand, "impenetrable" things are those that do not make sense to us at all no matter how hard we look at them (Spinoza also calls these "hieroglyphic") or which stretch our credulity beyond its limits.

"Perception" and "perceive" are likewise more inclusive terms than "understanding" and "understand," as when Spinoza says, for example, that the certainty that arose in prophets from signs was not mathematical, in that it did not follow from the necessity of the "perception" of the matter being "perceived" or seen (2.5.1; cf. 1 24.5). Occasionally I have rendered the verb *percipere* more idiomatically as "grasp," as when he says that the prophets taught such simple things as could easily be "grasped" by each (P.5.7).

**prophet (*prophetas*); prognosticator (*vates*); diviner (*divinus*); augur (*augur*); seer (*videns*); soothsayer (*ariolus*)**

Spinoza uses a variety of terms that are more or less synonymous with "prophet" (*prophetas*); but after one or more brief appearances, the others tend to disappear from sight. Perhaps just for that reason, their differences ought to be kept in mind.

A "prophet" is defined early on as someone who interprets some certain knowledge that God reveals, to those who cannot know the latter for certain on their own but need to take the prophet's word for it (1.1.2-3). Before even introducing that term, however, Spinoza uses two rough equivalents. He mentions "prognosticators" three times in the Preface, in connection with Alexander the Great (P.1.7-8). The term thus seems to be referring to pagan prophets, although it is clear from its one subsequent instance that it refers as well to biblical prophets who prophesy to pagans (3.5.23f.). Immediately beforehand, he mentions "soothsayers," though only once in the *Treatise*—alongside "prognosticators" in connection with Alexander (P.1.7). Only later in the Preface does he start to mention "prophets" as such—in connection with biblical and related matters (P.4.8, 5.2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11). The subsequent near-exclusivity and frequency of this term in the *Treatise* indicate that it is Spinoza's term of choice

from then on. Even so, the fact that he introduces his discussion of biblical prophets via a discussion of their pagan equivalents prepares the reader for the *Treatise*'s controversial attempt to assimilate their differences wherever possible (cf. 1.8.3, 10.2, etc.). Thus, both "diviner" and "augur" seem at first sight to be merely synonyms for pagan prophets; yet since these terms are being applied to Balaam, a Midianite prophet who is said to be a true prophet, and since a "pseudo-diviner" is immediately afterward said to be the pagan equivalent of a biblical "pseudo-prophet," it follows—perhaps shockingly enough for a pious reader of the *Treatise*—that the line between biblical and pagan prophets is blurred (3.5.36). This last consequence has further reverberations that are especially visible in Spinoza's Latin, where the noun "diviner" and the adjective "divine" (*divinus*) look exactly alike: the latter occurs some 190 times in what seems to be its more usual theological meaning.

Finally, a "seer" is just a biblical prophet by another name, as Spinoza points out in passing by quoting the pertinent biblical evidence in an ostensibly purely philological context (8.1.70).

**reason, plan, format, pattern, proportion, ratio, rationale, account (*ratio*); on account of (*propter*); on that account (*propterea*)**

The noun *ratio* as used in the *Treatise* means both "reason" and "plan"—often both at the same time. I have translated it one way or the other according to the immediate context, with an occasional footnote where necessary to remind the reader of both meanings. Sometimes it also means "format," "pattern," "proportion," "ratio," "rationale," or "account"—though normally this last English word serves in translating the preposition *propter* and related expressions (as "on account of," "on that account," etc.), and similarly "proportion" serves in translating the preposition *pro* (as "in proportion to"). Inasmuch as the foregoing list of English renderings of *ratio* all look the same in Spinoza's Latin, we are led to wonder whether a single meaning links them all.

nature is perceived simply under the "pattern" of the true and the false, i.e., apart from political life as such (4.1.6). Taken together, these several uses of *ratio* imply that human beings have access to "reason" (or "plans") only from within a perspective that the laws of nature either impose on them or else induce them to impose on themselves, within which they can then discern, arrange and/or follow certain "patterns."

The foregoing considerations seem consistent as well with *ratio* when rendered as "format" (as when God is said to have appeared to Moses under the "format" of compassion, gentleness, etc., i.e., in terms of those attributes, 2.9.17), "proportion" (as when psyches are said to be under the imperium of the highest power in some "proportion," i.e., to some extent, 17.1.9), "ratio" (as when Solomon is said to have been ignorant of the exact "ratio" between the circumference and the diameter of a circle, 2.8.9), "rationale" (as when Spinoza refers to the "rationale" of his line of argument, 10.2.51), and "account" (as when the highest law of nature is said to be that each thing endeavor to persevere as it is by taking no "account" of anything other than itself, 16.2.3). The reader is invited to consider further, in this connection, the Glossary entry on "mode," along with *Ethics*, Pt. II, Prop. 40, Schol. 1 and 2.

**soul (*anima*); spirit, psyche (*animus*); mind (*mens*); Spirit (*Spiritus*)**

Spinoza uses *animus* ("spirit," or sometimes "psyche" in the recent sense of the term) where the reader might expect *anima* ("soul") or *mens* ("mind").

What is the difference?

The term "soul" occurs only 6 times in the *Treatise* and only when Spinoza is translating or explaining a biblical notion (1.17.18, 20.7, 9; 3.5.16) or else mouthing a traditional theological idiom (P.3.1; 8.1.59). Spinoza never speaks of "soul" in his own name.

The term "spirit" or "psyche," on the other hand, occurs some 146 times and seems to mean what is left of "soul" once its biblical and traditional theological connotations are dropped. What remains is a set of purely psychological attitudes—evidently comprising, among other things, loyalty (cf. P.3.3), anger (cf. P.4.1, 6), consent (cf. P.5.1, 10, 11, 13), eagerness (cf. P.5.7)—along with the psychological housing for such attitudes (P.1.2, 7, 8, 5.1, 6.1; etc.). Usually, though not always, *animus* is conveniently rendered as "spirit" when referring to this or that attitude and as "psyche" when referring to the housing. Broadly speaking, then, "spirit" is equivalent to human spiritedness or self-assertiveness in one or another of its moods, and "psyche" to human spiritedness or self-assertiveness as such—though here and there I have indicated in a footnote where "spirit" could also be "psyche," and the reader might well find other instances.

The term "mind" occurs some 145 times and is the intellectual component or counterpart of "spirit" (or "psyche"). On the one hand, it refers to the contents of someone's mind—e.g., someone's intention (1.9.9 [second instance]) or someone's tenet (1.17.8, 21.3)—or, alternatively, to someone's mind as the sum of its particular contents (1.2.4). On the other hand, it refers to the mind pure and simple (1.9.1, 9 [first instance]; etc.), or perhaps more exactly the scientific mind at work understanding the laws of nature as decreed by God (1.4.1; 4.1.6; 13.1.21; 15.1.15; with 4.4.16).

Often, too, it may refer to more than one of the foregoing at the same time, as when Spinoza says, using theological language in a professedly unconventional way, that Christ communicated with God "mind to mind" (1.15.4, with 1.14.2-15.1).

The term "Spirit" (always capitalized, to avoid confusion with "spirit") translates *Spiritus* (always capitalized in Spinoza's Latin), which in turn translates the biblical word רוח (*ruach*) (see 1.16.2-17.20). In his survey of this Hebrew word's range of meaning within the biblical text, Spinoza says that it is equivalent to "soul" (1.17.18, 20.7). Sometimes, he adds, it means "spirit" or "mind" as well (1.17.17-18; etc.). Cumulatively, his discussion amounts to the suggestion that there is a biblical imprimatur for merging the meanings of all of the above terms. Nevertheless this suggestion is offset by his repeated depreciation of the understanding afforded by words as such, when compared with the clear and distinct understanding afforded by the laws of nature (1.4.1, 9.8, 16.1, 23.1; 4.4.27; 7.3.8). The net result is to elevate the importance of "mind" in the sense of the mind of the scientist (see above), so as to encourage readers to wonder as they go along whether among the diversity of meanings that appear on the face of all the aforementioned terms, there may be found that of "mind" in the elevated sense, or some approximation to it (cf., e.g, 4.4.45 with the *Treatise*'s further references to Solomon).

**tenet, sentence, sentiment, pronouncement (*sententia*)**

In Latin, the term "tenet" (*sententia*) means, to begin with, a "sentence," the grammatical unit of thinking. By extension, it means whatever may be expressed in a sentence—a judicial sentence, for example, or some other pronouncement. In addition, it means a "sentiment," that is, a statement that conveys either a privately conceived opinion (or feeling) or, alternatively, a publicly shared one. We find all these meanings in the *Treatise*, although they are offset by the overall drift of its theological argument.

The *Treatise* starts with the theological assumption that the Bible is the necessary and sufficient teacher of morality and that it presents its teaching in the form of articles of faith, or dogmas, which correspond to specific biblical statements (or "sentences"). These, then, are the Bible's "tenets" in both the theological and the grammatical senses of the term. The *Treatise* goes on to argue that, in order to resolve politically troublesome disagreements about the meaning of the Bible's theological "tenets," we need only acquire philological clarity about the meaning of the Bible's grammatical "sentences." Such is the task of Spinoza's newfound biblical criticism and of the biblical theology that he bases on it.

As for the resulting ambiguities and their implications for his overall argument, I have discussed the main one in some detail in my Interpretive Essay (see my comments on Ch. 1, 4, 5, 7, 14 and 20).

I should add that the Latin *sententia* is cognate with the verb *sentire*, which means both "to think" and "to feel" (and which I have discussed in the next Glossary entry).

**think, feel (*sentire*); be thinking (*cogitare*); deem (*putare*); figure, regard (*v.*) (*aestimari*); figure (*n.*) (*figura*); respect, regard (*n.*) (*respectus*)**

Broadly speaking, the *Treatise* is an argument in favor of freedom of thought—not only theological and political, but also philosophical. To see the full range and complexity of its argument, then, we should note the various ways there are to "think" in Spinoza's Latin.

In one way, "to think" (*sentire*) is to express an opinion that is of public interest and so possibly controversial, a theological or political opinion—in the language of the *Treatise*, a "tenet" (*sententia*; see the previous Glossary entry). Wherever feasible, I have preferred to translate this verb more literally as "to feel."

In another way, "to be thinking" (*cogitare*) is to be to considering something in a theoretical or contemplative way. I have tried to distinguish this term from the foregoing by using the progressive form of the verb—as when one "is thinking," e.g., about God, or parhelia, or an author's intentions (1.9.13; 2.8.7; 7.10.6).

Then again, to arrive at one's own private conclusion is "to deem" (*putare*)—as when the biblical Abraham "deemed" he was going to sacrifice his son (1.10.2) or Jonah "deemed" he would flee God's sight (2.9.27), or when Spinoza himself "deems" on the basis of his own scholarly scrutiny that King Solomon was as revered as any biblical prophet (4.4.34).

Finally, when referring to thinking in the sense of sizing something up, evaluating it or making an educated guess about it, Spinoza uses *aestimari*, which I have translated as either "to figure," as when Spinoza "figures" that everyone knows that the ancient Hebrews located the soul and the understanding in the heart (3.5.16), or "to regard," as when he says that, unlike prophetic or revealed knowledge, natural knowledge is not well "regarded" by human beings (1.2.3, 21.4). The noun "figure," however, is *figura*, as when God is said to have no "figure," i.e., image (1.9.12). Similarly, the noun "regard" is *respectus* (usually translated as "respect"), as when judges are expected to judge a case without "regard" for persons (16.7.5).

**vulgar (*vulgus*); spread (*vulgare*); philosopher (*philosophus*)**

When applied to human beings, the term "vulgar" refers to non-philosophers. The term "philosopher" is often ambiguous, however. I have tried to establish the latter's meaning with some care in my Interpretive Essay, particularly in my comments on P.6.1 and in the transition to those on Ch. 1, to which I refer the reader here.

In Latin, the verb *vulgare* ("spread")—meaning to publicize widely in speech or writing—is cognate with "vulgar," as well as with "Vulgate," the traditional Catholic translation of the Bible into Latin.

**welfare, salvation (*salus*)**

The Latin noun *salus* has both a theological meaning ("salvation") and a political meaning ("welfare"). Both meanings are very often found in the same word simultaneously. Spinoza's use of *salus* throughout the *Treatise* thus amounts to a pun. As in ordinary puns, the ambiguities and their full implications are not always

evident at first glance. Add to the foregoing that the discovery of multiple meanings tends to be unexpected. Not all readers, then, will discover these in the same instant (or at all).

Thus, in the initial appearance of *salus*, Spinoza is evidently speaking of those who are deceived by monarchs that have co-opted religion to serve their own political interests, into fighting in servitude to those interests as though they were fighting for their "salvation" (P.3.1). Almost immediately, toward the end of that same sentence in Spinoza's original Latin, he goes on to describe those who are condemned to death by religious censorship laws as being sacrificed to the hatred and savagery of their adversaries, rather than for the public "welfare" (*ibid.*). The reader is thereby invited to look again at the former instance of the term, to see whether its meaning is closer to the latter instance's than might have appeared at first. On second reading, then, the former instance turns out to be about whether fighting for one's supposed "salvation" is the same as to be fighting for one's "welfare"—whether the public's or, again, one's own. Meanwhile the second instance may now be seen as having to do, in addition, with whether as things stand one's religious "salvation" and the public "welfare" are congruent or even compatible, and if not whether they can be brought more into line with each other, as the *Treatise* as a whole tries to do.

In light of the systematic ambiguities that seem built into these first two instances of *salus*, it would not be unreasonable for readers of the *Treatise* to expect similar ambiguities throughout.

**worship (*n.*), cult, cultivation (*cultus*) ; worship (*v.*), cultivate, *etc.* (*colere*)**

As a noun, "worship" refers, in the first instance, to what Spinoza calls "outward worship" (P.4.1; 5.3.11; 19.1.3, 21), the rituals or ceremonies belonging to this or that organized religion. Likewise as a verb, it refers to performing those rituals or ceremonies (12.2.2; 17.3.11; etc.). But Spinoza uses the same noun to refer to the "cult" of obedience inculcated in the ancient Israelites by Moses' law (17.12.19), as well as to the "cultivation" of the understanding (5.1.20), of reason (16.5.3), of justice and charity (18.4.5; 19.1.5, 7) and of piety itself (19.2.7). So too the corresponding verb, besides having similar uses, refers to "cultivating" such things as natural science (6.1.3; 20.4.19), Bible interpretation (7.11.13), land (8.1.19), and the arts (20.4.19); and the same verb also refers to how one "treats" others (17.8.5; 19.2.6, 8).

Possible synonyms for Spinoza's noun in its multiple uses are "devotion," "dedication," and "veneration"; but Spinoza uses these terms as nouns or verbs as well (see Index of Terms). We are left to consider the likelihood that the term in question is indispensable for Spinoza and that its multiple uses are deliberately connected, so that "worshiping" something and "cultivating" it are somehow interchangeable. This last possibility goes along with the drift of the *Treatise*'s theological argument, which has to do with replacing, so far as possible, the "worship" of God—in what Spinoza regards as the superstitious meaning of the term—by means of the "cultivation" of justice and charity as mandated by God so as to conform with, or rather subserve, the requirements of the political imperium.

# *INTERPRETIVE ESSAY*

> . . . life's actions often allowing for no delay, it is a very certain truth that when it is not in our power to discern the truest opinions, we have to follow the most probable ones; and even though we did not notice more probability in some than in the others, nevertheless we had to decide on some and, inasmuch as they relate to practice, consider them afterward as no longer doubtful but as very true and very certain because the reason that made us decide is found to be such.[1]

> As if, in truth, we were to admit nothing as true for setting up our life wisely which could be called into doubt from any reason for doubting it, or in that most of our actions were not rather uncertain and full of hazard.[2]

Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) is the philosophical founding-document of both modern liberal democracy[3] and modern biblical criticism.[4] As a result, it is also the philosophical founding-document of modern liberal religion.

Spinoza published the *Treatise* anonymously and with a pseudonymous publisher, as a precaution against the notoriety it might cause him.[5] Notoriety soon followed anyway, once word spread in his native Amsterdam and beyond that he was its author. Telltale signs of his authorship are indeed visible here and there in the *Treatise* itself.

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[1] René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, Pt. III, ¶ 3 (*Discours de la méthode / Discourse on the Method*, ed. and trans. G. Heffernan [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994], 42; translation mine, M.Y.); see the second maxim of his *morale par provision*.

[2] 15.1.57. Cf. 20.4.16. For an explanation of the citation format used in the present translation, see the last paragraph of the Translator's Remarks.

[3] Lewis S. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon, 1958), 101-108; Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1965), 16f.; Stanley Rosen, "Benedict Spinoza," in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 456-75; Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 22-25, 121-22, 131-37.

[4] Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*; Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," in *The Books of Nature and Scripture*, ed. J.E. Force and R.H. Popkin (Dordrecht, 1994), 1-20, or *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. D. Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 383-407; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 202, 447-56; Paul J. Bagley, "Spinoza, Biblical Criticism, and the Enlightenment," in *Modern Enlightenment and the Rule of Reason*, ed. J. McCarthy (Washington, D C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 124-49.

[5] For an overview, see Pierre-François Moreau, "Spinoza's Reception and Influence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, 408-33; also, as a supplement, Bagley, "Spinoza, Philosophic Communication, and the Practice of Esotericism," in *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*, ed. Bagley (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 233-69. On Spinoza's immediate notoriety in the Netherlands, see Wiep van Bunge, "On the Early Dutch Reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," *Studia Spinozana* 5 (1989): 225-51; on his subsequent notoriety in Germany, see Frederic C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 48-61.

We might even suspect that he inserted them deliberately. Spinoza calls particular attention to himself from three points of view. From a religious point of view, he alludes to his Jewish background by occasionally recalling his earlier education in the literary sources he is criticizing (including the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic commentators, Kabbalah, and especially Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and *Guide of the Perplexed*), though he now no longer takes his bearings by them.[6] From a political point of view, he includes what amounts to a civic booster's description of his home town, as a flourishing example of a city where the freedom of the businessman, not the frown of religious authority, rightly rules.[7] And from a philosophical point of view, he makes a point of asking the "Philosopher reader" for whom his book is meant, as well as his country's official censors to whom it is available, to indicate if there are doubts about the political, religious and moral wholesomeness of its author (P.7.2, 20.8.2). Let us see how far these personal identification marks help us understand the *Treatise*'s overall argument.

**Spinoza's Religious Starting Point**

In 1656, at age 23, Spinoza was publicly excommunicated from Amsterdam's Jewish community, where he had been born and raised. The excommunication document speaks of "the horrible heresies he practiced and taught . . . ," though it does not spell them out.[8] Unlike, say, Uriel da Costa,[9] who had been excommunicated in 1623 and humiliated to the point of suicide after being ceremonially reaccepted (and subsequently re-excommunicated) in 1639-40, Spinoza never sought to return to Jewish orthodoxy by repenting of his heresies. Nor did he convert to Christianity. Instead he reportedly wrote a defense of those heresies. It was never published or preserved, however, and we can only surmise in what way, if any, it may have germinated into the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Around 1665, Spinoza wrote in a private letter that he was at work on a treatise concerning his views about the Bible. He summarizes his motives as follows:[10]

> 1. The prejudices of the theologians. For I know they very much prevent human beings from applying their spirit to philosophy. Therefore, I am busy exposing those prejudices and removing them from the minds of the more prudent.

[6] P.5 1, 1.9.1-2, 7.10.9-10, 9.1.57, 65, 12.1.9 (Bible); 1.9.1-2, 8.1.7 (commentators); 9.1.62 (Kabbalah); 15.1 8n (Maimonides), with P.3.4-5.13.

[7] 20.6.4, with P.3.3, 7.1-2, 20.7.1-8.1.

[8] The excommunication document is translated in full in Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1899), 17f.; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3; Wim Klever, "Spinoza's Life and Works," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, 16; Margaret Gullan-Whur, *Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza* (New York: St Martin's, 1998), 70f.; Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 120.

[9] See da Costa's autobiography, *Exemplar Humanae Vitae* (1640), in *Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa*, ed. C Gebhardt (Amsterdam: Societas Spinozana, 1922), 105-23; trans. John Whiston (1740), reprinted as Appendix 3 of Uriel da Costa, *Examination of the Pharisaic Traditions*, trans. H.P. Salomon and I.S.D. Sassoon (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 556-64; see also the translators' Introduction, 1-50.

[10] *Letter* #30 (*Opera*, IV, 166). Cf. Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 185f.

2. The opinion the vulgar have of me—they do not stop charging me with atheism; I am also forced to turn away this charge, so far as can be done.

3. The freedom of philosophizing and of saying what we think. I long to assert this in every mode—it is being suppressed hereabouts, owing to the extreme authority and whininess of the preachers.

Of these motives—removing theological prejudices from potential philosophers, clearing his name of the charge of atheism, and standing up for the freedom of philosophizing and self-expression in the face of overbearing clerics or rabbis—only the central one seems directly personal. Even so, Spinoza does not seem to have separated the defense of his personal honor (motive two) from his further literary roles as mentor to budding truth-seekers (motive one) and freethinker in defiance of pious truth-stiflers (motive three). Such, at any rate, is his reputation as it has come down to us in our own day, long after the uproar the *Treatise* caused when it first appeared. Nevertheless the foregoing biographical evidence, while consistent with Spinoza's religious views as he lets us glimpse them in the *Treatise*, does not go very far in accounting for those views.

Instead of relying mainly on outside evidence to explain Spinoza's religious views (or lack of them) in the *Treatise*, then, perhaps we are better off looking first and foremost at what he says in the *Treatise* itself. Where he is all too brief, as in his testimony about his early religious education, it may help to keep in mind either the immediate context of the argument at hand or a related statement elsewhere in the *Treatise*, or both. Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, for example, Spinoza tells us in no uncertain terms what he thinks about at least two thoughtful Jewish authorities whom he had studied earlier—Ibn Ezra, of whom he approves, and Maimonides, of whom he disapproves; some headway in understanding Spinoza's mature views may follow from our looking at the reasons he himself gives for his announced agreements and disagreements with these and other authorities.[11] As for our concomitant need to consider the immediate contexts of his various self-disclosures, we may also be helped by noticing Spinoza's repeated claim that he has written the *Treatise* painstakingly and in an orderly way, both Chapter by Chapter and as regards the work as a whole.[12]

Let us consider, to begin with, Spinoza's claim to orderliness as regards the work as a whole. Of the *Treatise*'s twenty Chapters, the first fifteen evidently treat theological matters. These include defining—actually, redefining—such traditional theological terms as prophecy, prophets, Israel's chosenness, divine law, religious ceremonies and histories, and miracles (Ch. 1-6); establishing a new science of biblical criticism modeled on modern natural science (Ch. 7-11); and, finally, supplying a non-sectarian theology based on the new biblical criticism and meant to be free of anything theologically or politically controversial (Ch. 12-15). Why, we may ask, does Spinoza

[11] 8 1.7-27, 90, with 2.9.14, 7.11 4, 10.2.4, 6, 15, 20 (Ibn Ezra); 1.10.3, 5.4.19-22, 7.11.21-39, 15.1.7, 35, with 10.2.2, A 25 (Maimonides).

[12] P.5.1, 7.2; P.3.4, 6.1, with 2.2.1, 3.2.1, 5.4.1, 6.1.7, 8.1.7, 79, 9.1.56, 14.1 6, 15.1.22, 16.1 3, 17.5.12.

see fit to treat these matters in just the order he does, and in just so many Chapters as he does? Why, moreover, does he apparently wait until three-quarters of the way though the *Treatise* before turning, in the remaining Chapters, to strictly political matters: the democratic basis of all political society (Ch. 16); a review and assessment of the biblical theocracy (Ch. 17-18); and the respective limits of religious and political authority (Ch. 19-20)? Answering these questions invites us to look further at how the overall sequence of Chapters fits with the *Treatise*'s combined theological and political subject matter.

According to the *Treatise*'s subtitle, Spinoza aims to show that religious and political life not only allows but requires "the freedom of philosophizing." This includes, in the present instance, freeing those who engage in philosophy or science from unwarranted theological influence. Spinoza indicates in his Preface that he has written the *Treatise* for a philosophical reader whose philosophizing is hampered by the belief that reason has to serve as handmaid to theology. What stands in the way of the freedom of philosophizing, in other words, is the reader's own prior theological commitments. Spinoza must loosen his reader's attachment to the received theology. Especially—though not only—given the overbearing character of the prevailing religious authorities, success depends on his proceeding cautiously. The *Treatise* therefore starts by accommodating its argument to theological premises accepted by its reader beforehand, and works from there step by step to its rather untheological conclusion. To judge by the number and titles of the *Treatise*'s chapters, then, fifteen theological steps are needed before Spinoza can begin to enter into its strictly political subject-matter directly. Accordingly, the *Treatise*'s first fifteen Chapters, rather than any simply extraneous evidence, seem the proper place to start for investigating why, from Spinoza's point of view, he distanced himself or found himself at some distance from the prevailing religions.

We shall try to retrace those steps in outline, once we have considered the relevance of his two other personal self-disclosures in the *Treatise*.

**Spinoza's Political Starting Point**

The *Treatise*'s culminating description of the city of Amsterdam is a further clue to the identity of its author. In touting the virtues of Amsterdam's commercial life, Spinoza shows himself to be a partisan in the political rift dividing the Netherlands of his day—between monarchists and republicans, or more exactly between the landed nobility and orthodox Calvinist clergy who supported William of Orange, the country's acknowledged military leader, and the free-trading merchants and Remonstrant (or liberal Calvinist) sects who supported Jan de Witt, the Netherlands' Grand Pensionary (or chief administrator) from 1653 until his assassination in 1672. Biographers report Spinoza's barely controlled outbursts of anger and sorrow during the mob violence surrounding the assassination, which might easily have ended fatally for him as well.[13] With de Witt's removal, we are also told, Spinoza stood to lose a state-authorized

[13] [J. Lucas,] *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*, ed. A. Wolf (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927), 117f., 114 (trans. 65f., 61f.); cf. J Colerus, *The Life of Benedict de Spinosa*, trans. Pollock, in *Spinoza*, 397f., with the report of Leibniz's quoted by Pollock, 35n.

pension that served as or supplemented his modest personal income; fortunately, his high-minded refusal to beg for its continuance won the hearts of de Witt's immediate successors, who decided the matter in his favor. All the same, there is something odd about the *Treatise*'s description of Amsterdam which is not fully accounted for by either Spinoza's political partisanship or his economic self-interest. According to the *Treatise*, Amsterdam is a cosmopolitan commercial city whose inhabitants display an easygoing religious and ethnic diversity. Yet the *Treatise* elsewhere alludes to the ongoing quarrels between monarchists and republicans, and (immediately following its glowing description of Amsterdam, no less) between Calvinists and Remonstrants (P.3.1-3, 18.4.8-20, 20.6.4). Either Spinoza's account of his native city is little more than a glossy chamber-of-commerce blurb, then, or it is intentionally elliptical—as if by "city of Amsterdam" he meant no more than what we mean today when we speak of the City of London or Wall Street. To suggest that the business of Amsterdam is simply business, as Spinoza does, is in either case to overlook the acknowledged fault-lines separating his country's entrenched political and religious factions. Here again, to come to terms with Spinoza's momentary self-disclosure, we are forced to consider more closely the evidence supplied by the *Treatise* itself.

Spinoza's description of Amsterdam occurs toward the end of Chapter 20, the *Treatise*'s last. It is meant to illustrate the theologically neutered political order at which his larger argument aims:

> . . .Take, for example, the city of Amsterdam, which, to its considerable enhancement and with the admiration of all nations, experiences the fruits of [religious and political] freedom. For in this most flourishing Republic and most outstanding city, all human beings of whatever nation and sect live with the greatest harmony; and for them to trust their goods to someone, they care to know only whether he is rich or poor and whether he is used to acting in good faith or by a ruse. Otherwise Religion or sect does not move them at all, since it does not help at all in winning or losing a cause before a judge; and no sect is so altogether hateful whose devotees (so long as they harm no one and pay each what is owed and live honorably) are not protected by the public authority and enforcement of the magistrates. . . . [20.6.4]

The immediate point of Spinoza's description is clear enough, and even trite nowadays: Let's get religion out of public life, as they do in Amsterdam, so that sectarian differences will not intrude on citizens' private freedom to buy and sell with one another and, in that way, to profit in common. But this practical proposal overlays a philosophical question that is central to the *Treatise*: How, and how far, can we successfully replace religion with commerce as the social bond?

In his appeal to Amsterdam, Spinoza is describing what we are meant to take as a *fait accompli*. Amsterdam's model religious and political freedoms are said to be enhanced by the city's thriving commercial spirit. Commerce, it seems, has displaced religion considerably in the hearts and minds of its citizens. As a consequence,

Spinoza's Amsterdam is ethnically and religiously diverse. Its diversity is no barrier to cooperation among its citizens, however, since if Spinoza is correct, the city itself is little more than a huge, bustling marketplace for trading goods and services. Here, he says, "all human beings" regardless of nationality or religion "live with the greatest harmony." Spinoza does not say that there are no conflicts among them, but only that such conflicts as there are tend to be over business matters instead of political or religious ones. That is, Amsterdamers live with the greatest harmony that might be expected among human beings for all practical purposes, a harmony that in no way excludes the need for courts to settle lawsuits among business competitors. The freedom of Spinoza's Amsterdam is thus, most noticeably, the freedom to choose business associates, and the most serious decisions his Amsterdamers face concern how to choose them.

But note how Spinoza says they make up their minds. They "care to know only whether [someone] is rich or poor and usually acts in good faith or by a ruse." Spinoza's words invite a second glance. Does he mean that they choose only those who are rich and honest, or perhaps poor but honest? Not necessarily, for there are two other possibilities as well: rich and full of ruses, or poor and full of ruses. In Amsterdam, one is evidently free to choose any or all types. The only limitations on one's choices are the existence of lawcourts and the "enforcement of the magistrates." Nevertheless these may not be sufficient to daunt ruse-happy Amsterdamers, whether rich or poor, who might well risk defying the laws wherever necessary or possible to make a business profit. To the extent that Amsterdam's political and religious authorities in turn are guided simply by the need to foster and preserve the freedom of Amsterdam's marketplace, it is hard to see where they could be of much help in resolving the fundamental moral ambivalence of the marketplace. How then, we must ask, could political and religious freedom in Amsterdam (or any other place like it) amount to much more than moral indifference?

In the face of this difficulty, Spinoza could easily reply that Chapter 14 of his *Treatise* derives from the biblical text a "catholic or universal faith" consisting of seven religious "dogmas" (14.1.36-46). These are to function as a commonly acceptable catechism in support of the political and religious tolerance suitable for liberal societies like Spinoza's Amsterdam. The dogmas are these: (1) a supremely just and merciful God exists; (2) God alone requires our highest devotion, admiration and love; (3) God is everywhere; (4) God is all-powerful; (5) worshiping God consists solely in justice and charitableness, or in love of neighbor; (6) such worship alone brings salvation, whereas submitting to pleasure brings undoing; and (7) God pardons the sins of those who repent. As we shall see in more detail, Spinoza seems to have arrived at these dogmas by counting the frequency-of-occurrence of biblical "tenets" (*sententiae*)—that is, of opinions articulated at least once in the biblical text and isolable in the form of sound-bites. The seven listed, being in effect the most frequent, appear least likely to be disagreed over by anyone professing allegiance to some biblical sect. They are acceptable because they can claim to be non-controversial, or doctrinally trivial, and utterly consistent with the *Treatise*'s proposed method for reading the Bible, which, as we shall see, identifies the Bible's most basic teachings

with its most frequently repeated teachings.

All the same, we cannot help wondering whether the dogmas at which Spinoza arrives in this way are adequate for meeting the difficulty just noted. Far from overcoming the moral ambivalence of Amsterdam's marketplace, they seem on closer inspection to share it and even compound it. Consider the following loopholes allowed by dogmas five through seven. What if a business executive claimed, in deference to dogma five, that the profits he generated through some ruse made possible more acts of justice and charitableness than he could have seen to otherwise; and, in deference to dogma six, that if he had meanwhile committed occasional acts of injustice or uncharitableness, he did so not from the motive of personal pleasure but from that of an executive's responsibility to his corporation's owners or stockholders; and finally, in deference to dogma seven, that if it were proved that he had done anything seriously unjust or uncharitable, he would be sure to repent! Who or what is there to judge further the moral or religious merits of his defense? Strictly speaking, we cannot even be sure here of a final judgment by a personal God who knows the secrets of the heart, since Spinoza's statement of these dogmas is meant to be compatible with the assimilation of God to nature as found in his *Ethics Demonstrated in a Geometrical Order*.[14]

To find our way through the difficulty presented by Spinoza's evident moral obtuseness, we are forced to consider as we go along something else he says in the *Treatise* about the desirability of elevating commerce over religion in political life. Speaking of the biblical theocracy, he remarks that

> . . .the form of such an imperium could perhaps only be useful for those who wanted to live to themselves alone, without outside commerce, and enclose themselves within their own limits and segregate themselves from the rest of the globe, and hardly for those for whom it is necessary to have commerce with others. [18.1.4]

Spinoza ascribes the limitations of the biblical theocracy to its being inhospitable to the need for "outside commerce." In other words, the details of the biblical laws—and by implication biblical morality itself—were originally meant only for a closed or self-contained society, whereas present circumstances according to Spinoza favor an open society. Spinoza's critique of the Bible here is largely political rather than strictly theological. Generalizing, we cannot help wondering to what extent the entire theological argument contained in the *Treatise*'s first fifteen Chapters—of which Spinoza's biblical criticism is the centerpiece—turns out to be dependent on the political argument in favor of liberal democracy as contained in the *Treatise*'s last five Chapters, rather than the other way around as his order of presentation might suggest. If so, we would have to suspect that Spinoza's theological argument for biblical criticism cannot be understood simply in its own terms, but is designed instead to prepare for the more decisive political argument to come. But to arrive at this suspicion, whether sooner (while reading the *Treatise*'s overtly theological Chapters)

[14] *Ethics*, Pt. I, Props. 15, 29 Schol. (*Opera*, II, 56f., 71).

or later (while reading its overtly political ones), is not yet to be able to answer the further question concerning why, once Spinoza has overcome his reader's initial resistance to the theologically unsettling implications of the argument of the *Treatise* as a whole, some semblance of old-fashioned biblical theology is still needed, even or especially from Spinoza's newfound liberal democratic point of view. We must wait to face this last question until we have considered the related difficulty inherent in Spinoza's third autobiographical disclosure in the *Treatise*, his appeal to its philosophical addressee.

### Spinoza's Philosophical Starting Point

It is difficult to know what Spinoza means by asking his "Philosopher reader" to indicate if there are doubts about the political, religious and moral wholesomeness of his argument in the *Treatise*, and then failing to leave his name as author (P.6.1-2). Perhaps we can arrive at what Spinoza has in mind by trying to characterize his chosen reader more exactly.

Yet here we face a further difficulty. Spinoza commends his *Treatise* to its reader in a puzzling way. He emphasizes that the argument of the *Treatise* is both outstanding and useful. He adds, however, that he has not said anything whose main points are not already known more than sufficiently by philosophers. He goes on to say that he is not inclined to recommend his book to the vulgar, that is, to non-philosophers. These are likely to be displeased with it for three reasons: they have strong religious prejudices; they are incorrigibly superstitious; and they stubbornly follow their impulse to praise and blame rather than following reason. Non-philosophical readers are thus likely to misinterpret the *Treatise* and become troublesome to others as a result. In Spinoza's words, such readers are "an obstacle to others who would philosophize more freely if this one thing did not stand in the way: they deem that reason has to serve as handmaid to theology" (P.6.2). Spinoza limits the philosophical usefulness of the *Treatise* to that of clearing away this last obstacle. And yet there remains an apparent inconsistency in Spinoza's repeated references to philosophy here. How can his book be outstanding and useful to a philosophical reader if everything it says except for the details is already well known to philosophers? Then again, if this last is the case, why would acquaintance with those details help such a reader "philosophize more freely"?

To untie this complicated knot, we must see Spinoza's characterization of his intended reader in the context of the argument of the Preface as a whole. Afterwards we can face more directly the difficulties left over from Spinoza's other two self-disclosures: how he finds himself at a considerable remove from both Judaism and Christianity, and why he holds that some semblance of biblical theology is needed nevertheless.

## Spinoza's Intended Reader

Spinoza does not mention that he has written his *Treatise* for a philosophical reader until the end of the Preface, after he has outlined the *Treatise*'s two main practical proposals—biblical criticism and liberal democracy (P.6.1-2, with P.4.1-5.13,

14-18). His delay in spelling out his philosophical intention might meanwhile lull the reader into considering the *Treatise* as nothing more than a theologically sophisticated political pamphlet. One has to wonder whether, or in what way, Spinoza's book has the philosophical merit he eventually claims for it. True, as the *Treatise*'s subtitle announces beforehand, what connects its combined theological and political proposals is "the freedom of philosophizing." But how can the reader know whether "philosophizing" here means more than asserting the author's partisan opinions or interests quite apart from a full openness to their practical and theoretical implications—whether, in other words, it is anything besides self-promotion or ideology?

**The Critique of Superstition**

That there is something more is suggested by the Preface's opening sentence: "If human beings could regulate all their affairs with certain counsel, or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would not be bound by any superstition" (P.1.1). Here is a practical project, to be understood in light of its far-reaching theoretical implications. Can we as human beings govern or control everything that touches us—if not automatically, at least by means of "certain" or reliable advice? Put another way, can we become the steady favorites, or non-intermittent beneficiaries, of fortune or chance, as we sometimes wish we could? These two questions are at bottom the same. Spinoza raises the prospect of our having everything we want when and as we want it, and so of achieving complete freedom from worry in our lives. The former way of putting the question places the burden on our own efforts to find good advice. The latter way leaves it to some superhuman supplier and distributor for everything we need. Still, the answer in either case seems to be no. Complete freedom from worry is unlikely, as is evidenced by the ongoing prevalence of superstition in human life. But Spinoza would have us keep taking our bearings by that unlikelihood anyway. His subsequent attack on superstition, which occupies the bulk of the Preface, is guided by the premise that success in freeing ourselves from worry over whether things around us will affect us for good or ill is inversely proportional to the presence of superstition. If and when philosophical considerations proper emerge in the *Treatise*, then, we may expect to see them as part of the overriding question of how to live worry-free.

If superstition is the worry-driven appeal to false gods, then what is bad about it is that it is so deceiving (P.1.2-8). It deepens our worries instead of lifting them. According to Spinoza, people turn to superstitious behavior out of a mixture of overconfidence and desperation. We long for an endless number and variety of good things for ourselves, but all too often we fail to achieve them. One solution to this difficulty might be to restrain or moderate our longings.[15] Yet we tend not to do so. We prefer to hope that fortune will bring the objects of our longings within our reach

[15] Moderation, despite what Spinoza will soon suggest about both classical political philosophy and biblical thought, would seem to be the core of the practical solution they both happen to share. See, for example, Plato, *Republic* 389d-390a, 430d-432a, *Laws* 696a-697c, 711c-712a; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1117b23-1119b18; also Ex. 20:14, Num. 15:37-40, Dt. 5:18, with Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Ahavah, Hilchot Tsitsit* 3.13 (in Maimonides, *The Book of Adoration*, ed. and trans. Moses Hyamson [Jerusalem: Boys Town Publishers, 1965], 144).

anyway. When fortune continues to disappoint us, however, we are at a loss to know whether to keep up hope or give in to our worst fears that nothing good will come our way ever. We vacillate between extremes of optimism and pessimism. In good times, says Spinoza, we shun advice as if done an injury by it. In bad times, we seek and take advice indiscriminately, and go so far as to look in odd places—premonitions, dreams, childish idiocies, and so on—for omens to confirm our high or low expectations of our future. In our vacillating, we act as if nature collaborated in furthering or frustrating our private hopes and fears on purpose, and devise strange practices to propitiate the God or gods we believe control nature to intervene on our behalf. We thus imagine nature to be as flighty and impressionable as we are. Whereas God or nature rightly understood would enable us to correct our instability, either or both are construed by the superstitious so as to legitimize it.

Spinoza's critique of superstition might almost pass for the Bible's own.[16] His actual examples of superstitious practices include augury and divination and, by implication and indirect description, idolatry. He mentions the superstitious worship of a "highest Deity" only alongside that of other, lesser gods, as if to leave the impression that his critique merely replicates or extends the biblical polemic against such worship. His chief example for showing the correlation between superstition and fear is Alexander the Great, who began consulting prophets when exposed to military uncertainty in Persia at the Gates of Susa and stopped doing so only after having destroyed the Persian king Darius—but turned to them again when uncertainty recurred, as his allies began to defect, his enemies were threatening, and he himself lay wounded.[17] Immediately after citing this example, Spinoza offers a broad generalization on the basis of claiming to be able to cite "the utmost of examples" that show the same thing as clearly as can be. The resulting generalization hedges and even straddles the line between heathen and biblical prophets. It is that human beings struggle with superstition only in moments of anxiety, that the things they worship then are "nothing but phantasms, and hallucinations of a sad and fearful psyche," and that prophets gain the greatest public credibility, and so pose the greatest challenge to legitimate rulers, during the most severe public crises. Although the Latin term Spinoza uses for prophet here is *vates*, by which he refers to heathen prophets and, eventually, to Israelite prophets who prophesied to heathens as well as to Israelites, this term is soon eclipsed in the *Treatise* by *propheta,* by which he refers to all prophets whether Israelite or non-Israelite (cf. 3.5.23, 25-34). In failing to make clear whether there is any important difference between heathen and biblical prophets, Spinoza in effect merges the two. In any event, we catch our first direct glimpse of the biblical prophets only later on in the Preface, and only after passing through a corridor occupied by heathen prophets as just described.

Looking at heathen and biblical prophets alike from the standpoint of their being obstacles to freedom from worry leads Spinoza to focus on the common political circumstances—or crises—in which all prophets are said to flourish (P.2.1-4). The

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[16] See, e.g., Ex. 20:3-5, 32·1-34:17, Lev. 19:31, Dt 4 15-20, 5:7-10, 13:2-19, 18:9-22, Is. 1:10-17, 44:9-20, Jer. 2 23-28, Ps. 97:7, 115:4-8.

[17] See Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander* V.4 with VII.7.

same personal instability that breeds superstition, we are shown, brings political instability as well. This line of thought allows Spinoza a further observation. "Nothing regulates a multitude more effectively than superstition," he remarks, quoting Alexander's biographer Quintus Curtius.[18] Superstition's destructive effects on public life being practically unstoppable, Spinoza limits himself to the possibilities for damage-control. Thus, on the one hand, if a king neglects the superstitions of his people—that is to say, if he ignores them and leaves them unregulated—then he will find himself at one time venerated and at another time execrated at their whim. On the other hand, the worrisome political consequence of such neglect suggests the possibility, or rather the necessity, that kings join in what they cannot defeat, by deliberately adding to the body of popular superstitions with beliefs and practices which are likely to promote veneration rather than execration of themselves, and codifying and enforcing the entire package by law. This second, more stabilizing option amounts to the thoroughgoing politicizing of superstition. Its most successful practitioners, according to Spinoza, have been the Turks, "who consider it a sacrilege even to dispute, and occupy each's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no place in the mind for sound reason or for doubting anything."

Mention of the extreme example of Turkey sets the Spinozist alternative into proper relief (P.3.1-4). To the Turkish (Muslim) monarchy, Spinoza opposes his own country, the Netherlands. It is a "free republic." As republicans, his fellow countrymen are spared the need to risk their lives and welfare to defend the dubious claim (or "boast") of a single human being, a king, to rule. They are by comparison left to themselves in peace. As free, moreover, they are likewise spared the need to conform to a single set of religious superstitions designed to suit the interests of kings. On the contrary, "occupying each's free judgment with prejudices, or controlling it in any mode, conflicts altogether with the common freedom." A practical difficulty remains, however. It accounts for why Spinoza addresses the *Treatise* to his countrymen in the first place. They need to know how the freedom of religion proper to their republic fits with the further need, as they see it, that religion reinforce the social bond—what Spinoza calls "piety and the peace of the Republic." Their need to know is pressing, since there are still those among Spinoza's countrymen (despite what we have already seen Spinoza say in Chapter 20 of the *Treatise* about Amsterdam itself) who see non-conformity to a single, state-authorized religion as seditious and hence punishable. Spinoza offers them a simple formula. It is that deeds alone should be punishable, not words or thoughts.[19] Religious differences, rightly understood, fall into the latter category. The argument of the *Treatise* as a whole is, among other things, designed to explain and defend Spinoza's formula.

Having come within sight of the philosophical considerations that have led us into Spinoza's Preface in the first place, we may look back for a moment to see more clearly why he has framed his argument leading up to them in terms of the dubious likelihood of complete freedom from worry. It has to do with the Turkish alternative to his formula as just described. The Turkish alternative, to recall, is the most successful

[18] *History of Alexander* IV.10.

[19] Spinoza takes this formulation from Tacitus, *Annals* I.72.

instance of a political accommodation to superstition. To show the political merits of his own formula most persuasively, Spinoza must show its superiority in every way to its chief old-fashioned rival. What he has called the Turkish religion, or rather some less successful variety of it, continues to attract his contemporaries—those, say, who insist that their country is not a "free" but a "Christian" republic (or monarchy), where this or that religious sect has to prescribe the social bond. He must then confront the "Turkish" alternative in its full force, yet tactfully enough to begin to persuade rather than alienate those among his intended readers who still incline to it.[20]

Indeed, Spinoza has already confronted that alternative in principle, if most succinctly, in the Preface's opening sentence, whose elaboration we have been following up to this point. Consider that, of the two ways by which he has induced us there to think about freedom from worry, the second one—that fortune might favor us always—is another way of stating the fundamental assumption promulgated in a superstitious manner by the Turks. Theologically expressed, it is that there is a personal God who exercises particular providence on behalf of his adherents. A little later on in the Preface, as we shall see, Spinoza will say in so many words that, aside from a few external features, he finds very little difference in this regard between Turks on the one hand and Christians, Jews or heathens on the other. Spinoza's confrontation with the "Turkish" version of the questionable belief that freedom from worry is possible under the guidance of a providential God is his philosophical confrontation with organized or politicized religion as such.

## The Need for Biblical Criticism

Having singled out his enemy, organized religion, Spinoza turns to outlining his plan of attack (P.4.1-8). He does so by way of recalling the questions that originally prodded him into writing the *Treatise*. He thus provides a gloss on his overall strategy in the guise of an autobiographical statement.

The gloss, like the *Treatise* itself, is divided into two unequal parts: a longer, theological argument indicating the desirability of biblical criticism, and a shorter, political argument indicating the desirability of liberal democracy.[21] Both are needed to replace so far as possible the superstitious approach to the problem of worry with Spinoza's more sober and enlightened approach. To propose biblical criticism without liberal democracy would be to ask society to hand over its old protective garment—the respectable moral teaching contained in the Bible—for minute examination and possible refurbishing, while neglecting to supply a decent substitute for society's use in the meantime. To propose liberal democracy without biblical criticism, on the other hand, would be to invite moral criticism from superstitious readers of the Bible and to ignore whatever limited endorsement for liberal democracy may be found in the biblical text itself as newly interpreted. Since Spinoza's intended reader is typically more versed in the intricacies of the biblical text than in the ins-and-outs of practical statesmanship, the theological argument is necessarily prior to and longer than the political one. An important task of Spinoza's argument is to reverse his reader's

[20] Consider 5 4.15

[21] See the titles of Ch. 1-15 and 16-20 of the *Treatise*, respectively.

priorities here.[22]

Before writing the *Treatise*, Spinoza tells us autobiographically, he had often wondered how Christianity ever came to be a persecuting religion. Christianity is supposed to be the religion of "love, gladness, peace, continence and faith toward all" (P.4.1). Yet as things stand, Christians are divided into competing sects. They magnify their disagreements. They even bear extreme hatred toward one another on account of them. Christians have become as it were sectarians first and Christians second. Not that the situation is much different, Spinoza adds, among Turks, Jews, or heathens. There are differences in dress, ritual, place of worship, doctrines and oaths, of course; but these are outward trappings. "Otherwise," he remarks, "life is the same for all" (P.4.2). Spinoza's remark is double-edged in its depreciation of organized religion. On the one hand, he implies, there is a sameness to human life beneath, and so apart from, any religious veneer. On the other hand, all religions (presumably because of something untoward in that underlying sameness) are like Christianity in tending to persecute the heterodox.

Spinoza never doubted his preliminary or commonsense answer to his question about the cause of Christian persecutions in particular. His answer was pointed and not pretty. It had to do with the vulgarization of Christianity.

Differently stated, persecutions were the inevitable consequence of the politicizing of Christianity, its accommodation to the routine requirements of political life. Once Christianity became an organized religion, vulgar Christians began to look to it for vulgar political rewards. There ensued a fierce competition for those rewards—decent jobs, emoluments of office, popular honors—so that the spread of Christianity was inseparable from the greed and ambition which accompanied it. Churches degenerated into theaters.[23] Teachers of religion gave way to spellbinding orators and castigators. Proper openness to the "divine light" thus being stifled, so too were Christian love, tolerance, and belief in the Bible. All that was left were external rituals, "by which the vulgar seem more to flatter than to adore God," and "absurd" dogmas, which "seem as if devised with the given task of extinguishing the light of understanding inwardly" (P.4.4). The whole result was complicated by the fact that theologians came to defend Christian dogmas by drawing on biblical prooftexts. These they interpreted as "profound mysteries," with the help of speculations drawn from Aristotelian and Platonic philosophers (P.4.7). But in assimilating the teachings of the biblical prophets to those of the heathen philosophers, they show, according to Spinoza, that they have lost sight of the original meaning of the biblical text and "do not so much believe in

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22 Presupposing the success, or at any rate the viability, of the argument of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza's *Political Treatise* seeks instead "to demonstrate, by a certain and indubitable plan, what best fits with practice and to deduce it from the condition of human nature itself," quite apart from theological considerations—though before doing so Spinoza proceeds to restate and demonstrate "apodictically" the relevant doctrines of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the *Ethics*. See *Political Treatise* I.4, II.1-24 (in *Opera*, III, 274, 276-84; Spinoza, *The Political Works*, ed. and trans. A.G. Wernham [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958], 262-63, 266-83).

23 Consider, in the light of Spinoza's subsequent account of the absorption of philosophical controversies into Christian theology, Francis Bacon's "idols of the theater," *New Organon*, Pt. I, Aphs. 72-73, 75 (ed. F.H. Anderson [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960], 59-61, 62); also Bacon's reference to "theater" in *New Atlantis*, paragraph 6 (ed. Jerry Weinberger [2nd ed.; Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1989], 47f.).

Scripture as go along with it" (P.4.8). In other words, their professions of faith were neither biblically informed nor religiously sincere; they were hypocritical. Another sign of the foregoing is that, disagreements aside, those theologians were forced to assume at the outset of their arguments that the Bible's teaching "is everywhere truthful and divine" so long as it fit with their prior, philosophically-induced—and persecution-inducing—conclusions (P.4.8). But this, Spinoza protests indignantly, is to get things backwards. For all these reasons, a full understanding of the problem of Christian persecution and its possible resolution turned out to depend on an adequate recovery of the original meaning of the biblical text.

While calling attention to his having contrived a "method" for interpreting the biblical text, Spinoza does not tell us in the Preface what that method is (P.5.1-13). The point of Spinoza's discussion here is simply to indicate why his method was needed. Hence he dwells largely on the practical benefits of applying it.

Method was needed for the purpose of enabling Spinoza to focus on the Bible itself, without being distracted by the results of his pre-methodical reflections on the cause of Christian persecutions. Those results were disturbing. He reiterates them briefly, as if for emphasis: reason ("the natural light") is rejected as impious; men's words pass for God's; gullibility masquerades as faith; and Christians are fighting over imported philosophical claims. Spinoza says that he could add "a great many other things," except that they "would take too long" to spell out (P.5.1). What all this amounts to, it seems, is the ambivalent character of Christianity itself. As things stand, Christianity is a poor guardian of the biblically-inspired morality it espouses. It does not practice what it preaches. It cannot, if Spinoza's earlier account of the vulgarization of Christianity is correct, since its professed teaching—"love, gladness, peace, continence and faith toward all"—fails to come to grips with the politically corrupting effects of human greed and ambition. Spinoza's method therefore isolates the biblical text from the received Christian reading of the text in order to discover how far the inadequacies of Christianity which have led to Christian persecutions may be traced to a possible misreading. Spinoza allows his Christian readers to continue to esteem the Bible, while at the same time he encourages them to despise what their religion has done with the Bible. By making available to them the fruits of his method, he draws them *pari passu* into a process of theological self-correction.

Spinoza recalls seven theological questions about the Bible which his method has allowed him to answer "very clearly" while putting the received answers to one side.[24] He does not share his own answers to those questions so much as he testifies to the benefits of having reached such answers as he did. The benefits prove to be cumulative. Listing the questions in three groups, he joins the first three questions, separates off the fourth, then joins the remaining three, so as to follow each group of questions with a benefit statement concerning his reported answers. The first three questions were all about biblical prophecy: What was it? Why did God reveal Himself through prophets? Were prophets then accepted because they were wise or because

[24] Descartes likewise puts received teachings to one side in raising questions about the biblical text which his method allows him to answer "very clearly" (*bien clairement*); see *Discours de la méthode/Discourse on the Method*, Pt. V, ¶ 2 (Heffernan, 66-67).

they were pious? Spinoza's brief testimony concerning the benefit of his answers here is that the prophets' teachings were to be taken seriously only in moral matters, not in theoretical ones—on the unstated premise, as regards his answer to the third question at least, that the prophets were pious rather than wise. Spinoza's central question was why the Hebrews were called God's chosen people. His answer here was "nothing else" than that "God chose for them a certain area of the world where they could live securely and advantageously" (P.5.5). The benefit of his arriving at this answer, especially after having already determined that the Bible's authority is limited to moral matters, was that he learned from it that the Mosaic law was entirely bound to the Hebrews' political autonomy and has since lost all obligatory force as a result of the collapse of that autonomy. Finally, Spinoza asked three more questions in order to know whether one should infer from the Bible that human understanding is by nature corrupt. The exact questions were whether the divine law revealed through the prophets and apostles for all human beings was any different from what reason ("the natural light") also teaches, whether miracles go against the order of nature, and whether miracles show God's existence and providence better than natural science does. His answers in each case, being no, emancipated him from the need to look to the Bible for intellectual guidance, just as his previous answers had emancipated him from the need to look to it for moral guidance. At the same time, in an odd way those answers also pointed him toward the *Treatise*'s political teaching—liberal democracy—on putatively biblical grounds.

What is odd about how his biblical discoveries pointed Spinoza toward liberal democracy is that it was an argument from silence. The Bible as he now read it is by and large silent about philosophical matters. It teaches simple devotion toward God. Such devotion consists entirely of acts of justice and charity. Since the Bible's teaching is meant for "the spirit of the multitude," its rhetorical style and supporting reasonings must be appropriately simple-minded (P.5.7). The Bible's wish to impose tight moral standards requires it to tolerate loose intellectual ones. To exhort its addressees to obey God wholeheartedly by being just and charitable, that is to say, it has to use language suited to their capacity and opinions. It makes no effort to demonstrate anything with logical rigor. Hence, Spinoza inferred, it does not compete with philosophy on its own footing. Far from clashing with philosophy, it has "nothing in common" with it. Spinoza drew the further theological inference that the Bible leaves its adherents free to pursue philosophical arguments on their own, if they are so inclined. In that way, his theological discussion anticipates the possibility of a political order that would grant such freedom to all explicitly, where the Bible (according to his argument) has done so only implicitly.

Spinoza seems on reflection to have been aware of his own lack of rigor in arguing from the Bible's silence about the freedom of philosophizing to its endorsement of it. He speaks of the need to establish the entire matter "apodictically," that is to say, with certainty (P.5.8). He promises to show in the *Treatise* that the proper way to interpret the Bible is for "its whole knowledge of spiritual matters" to be sought within its own pages ("from itself alone") rather than from what those pages would have us look to in ourselves and the world around us ("what we know by the natural

light"). The Bible, so construed, teaches only about itself, not about anything outside itself. Its views are "relics of the time," as opposed to being thoughtful insights into its own or any other time. Why then, one might ask, should anyone ever have believed otherwise about the Bible, so as to insist on political conformity to its supposed teachings about theoretical matters? Spinoza's answer has to do with the vulgar prejudices traceable to the politicizing of Christianity as he has outlined it earlier. The vulgar, he now remarks, mistake worship of the Bible—of a text that they are in the habit of deferring to superstitiously—for worship of God.[25] But practically speaking, he adds, no one can reasonably insist that another conform to this or that opinion on the grounds that he considers it to be the word of God from his having found it mentioned in the Bible. Human beings, Spinoza remarks, differ too widely from one another. Their mental casts are "highly varied"; "one acquiesces better in some opinions and another in others"; and "what moves one to religion moves another to laughter" (P.5.13). It is therefore prudent, not simply pious, he concludes, to leave each to the freedom of his own judgment in theoretical matters, so long as he is just and charitable in practical matters. Spinoza's dubious theological argument concerning the Bible's tacit endorsement of philosophy, it now appears, was only preparatory to his arriving at a political argument that could be considered indubitable.

Put differently, Spinoza's biblical argument in favor of the freedom of philosophizing unsupervised by religion is a rather free use of the Bible. It is an instance of what it asserts. Theologically, it begs the question whether the Bible's evident silence about philosophy is an indication of permission rather than prohibition. For that reason alone, Spinoza's appeal to the biblical text is incomplete, his method notwithstanding. The principle that whatever the Bible does not forbid it allows, in other words, stands or falls with the *Treatise*'s political argument as such.

**The Need for Liberal Democracy**

The Preface's political argument, though shorter than its theological argument, is likewise divided into three parts (P.5.14-18). The three parts of its theological argument correspond to the stages Spinoza recounts autobiographically as having led to his writing the *Treatise*. Its political argument mirrors those three-stage developments as well. Whereas the Preface's theological argument traces the origin and development of Spinoza's questions about religion and politics, its political argument outlines the practical scope and limits of his answers to those questions.

Recall the three stages of Spinoza's intellectual autobiography. First came his naïve perplexity about Christian persecutions and their cause. Next came the imposition of method onto his reading of the Bible so that he might free himself from his perplexity enough to discover for certain whether the Bible, understood in its own terms, could have been the cause of those persecutions. Finally came his reflections in the aftermath of applying his method. That there was something more to reflect on is clear from the implicit acknowledgement of his lack of rigor in purporting to establish the Bible's tolerance of philosophizing on the basis of its mere silence about

[25] Consider Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* I.31 (trans. S. Pines [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 67.)

philosophizing. Without Spinoza's establishing this last conclusion apodictically, his theological argument would remain, as we have already seen, seriously incomplete. True, one might acquiesce anyway in Spinoza's cumulative suggestion that Christian persecutions are caused not by the biblical text rightly understood, but by theologians abusing that text in the light of quasi-philosophical controversies arising from imported, Aristotelian and Platonic doctrines. But, on the other hand, one might equally infer that there must be something about the biblical text itself, despite Spinoza's effort to exculpate it, which has caused theologians to become receptive to those alien doctrines in the first place.[26] Had Spinoza not turned to political considerations at this point, his perplexity about the relation between the doctrinal controversies endemic to philosophy and the justice and charitableness taught by the Bible—which has by now emerged as the underlying concern of his autobiography—would have remained unresolved for him.

The first stage of the Preface's political argument is meant to supply the apodictic demonstration, quite apart from the biblical text, for the desirability of tolerating philosophical—and, derivatively, theological—differences. Spinoza's demonstration appeals to "natural right."[27] His premise is that natural right is identical with "the longing and power of each." In other words, nature is said to produce individuals that seek to persevere as individuals with everything at their disposal. Each particular individual is by nature only that individual and nothing else. Hence "no one is bound by right of nature to live on the basis of another's mental cast." Each is, on the contrary, "the avenger of his own freedom"—or, perhaps, "of *its* own freedom," since Spinoza is not limiting himself here to a consideration of human nature but thinks in terms of what humans share with all other beings.[28] No individual can rightfully give up that freedom, therefore, except by an act of freedom. But a human individual might well decide to transfer his freedom to another who would "defend" or help maintain his existence on his behalf. If so, he transfers it "together with his right to live on the basis of his own mental cast"; that is, he gives up something of his natural individuality and must now defer to the recipient or recipients of that transfer, whom Spinoza calls the "highest powers." The highest powers in turn acquire from any and all donors an enhanced right to do anything they can to maintain themselves as the new and sole "avengers of right and freedom," even or especially over against their original donors, who are now their subjects. Nevertheless, for the highest powers to act willfully or high-handedly against subjects would be foolish, since "no one can so deprive himself of his power to defend himself that he stops being a human being" (P.5.16). That is to say, no subject can ever forget that he is an individual endeavoring to persevere as such, and so is apt to rebel against the highest powers if the latter in turn happen to forget that about him. This threat sets limits to what the

[26] Consider, e.g., Dt. 4:6, with Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II.11, III.31 (trans. Pines, 276, 524)

[27] See also Spinoza's fuller discussion in Ch. 16 of the *Treatise.*

[28] Contrast Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ch. 2 (Latin version, ed. H. Warrender [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], 98-107; English version, ed. H. Warrender [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], 51-61); *Leviathan*, ch. 14 (ed. M. Oakeshott [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960], 84ff.).

highest powers are able—or, what is the same thing here, obliged[29]—to do vis-à-vis their subjects. The limits may be publicly acknowledged either implicitly, by means of the highest powers' prudent forbearance, or else explicitly, by means of laws. In either case, the subject's calculated surrender of his natural freedom, motivated as it is by his private worry over how to persevere as an individual, turns out to be the safest guarantee of that freedom. At the same time, given the circumstances Spinoza has been describing all along, it is also—unlike superstition—the safest guarantee of political stability.

That Spinoza recognizes the theological bearing of the foregoing demonstration is evident in the second stage of his political argument. It consists of a single statement: "These things having been considered, I go on to the Republic of the Hebrews, which I describe at enough length to show how, for what reason and by whose decree, religion began to have the force of right, and also other things in passing which seemed worthwhile as information." (P.5.17) This statement indicates Spinoza's intention, in the body of the *Treatise*, to extend the priority given to freedom in his general understanding of politics to the Bible's own understanding of politics in particular.[30] For example, he now speaks of the biblical polity as a republic, whereas during his earlier discussion of the politicizing of superstition he had implied that all political religions were originally founded with a view to the advantage of kings and so must have been monarchies.[31] At the same time, he promises to show the process by which biblical religion first became politicized, with the implication that biblical religion once had a pristine, pre-political phase, which readers are for the moment allowed to identify with the "natural" individualism Spinoza has just finished spelling out in the first stage of the Preface's political argument.[32]

The third stage of Spinoza's political argument in the Preface also consists of a single sentence immediately following the previous stage (P.5.18). It returns matters to the first stage of the theological argument, just as the second stage of the Preface's political argument, with its focus on the Bible, returned matters to the corresponding stage of his theological argument. This final stage of the political argument promises to resolve Spinoza's original perplexity about Christian persecutions in a practical way, as a result of his combined arguments so far.

The practical solution he offers is twofold. First, the highest powers are said to have exclusive authority not only over public life but also over religion.[33] Second, however, they exercise that authority best by allowing complete freedom of speech and opinion—including, of course, freedom of religious belief as the *Treatise* now understands it.[34] The first part of Spinoza's solution here would authorize rulers to

[29] A sign of Spinoza's identifying moral obligation with political power is his systematically ambiguous use throughout the *Treatise* of the verb *teneri* ("to be bound"), as in the Preface's opening sentence, to mean both "duty-bound" and "constrained."

[30] See Ch 17-18 of the *Treatise*.

[31] The titles of Ch. 17 and 18 of the *Treatise* both speak of the "Republic of the Hebrews."

[32] 17.5.1-7 associates that phase with the two month period between the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian slavery and the promulgation of their law at Mount Sinai (see Ex. 15:22-19:9)

[33] See the argument of Ch. 19 of the *Treatise*.

[34] See the argument of Ch. 20 of the *Treatise*.

prevent doctrinal controversies from leading to sectarian persecutions, though the second part would not let them do so by suppressing doctrinal differences in the first place. Exactly how they are to exercise their authority over religion, Spinoza in the Preface leaves open for the time being.[35] Meanwhile the two pieces of advice are offered in preference to any that would impose or perpetuate the teaching of some political religion or other as the social bond pure and simple.

Obviously Spinoza's solution puts a great premium on the prudence of the rulers, or else on their openness to sound advice, rather than simply on, say, explicit constitutional guarantees to protect the ruled. More than that, he requires that rulers be sufficiently liberated from the attractions of political religion and sufficiently drawn to freedom as the be-all and end-all of political life. Practically speaking, that is the direction of the *Treatise*'s political argument as such. Spinoza offers a safe haven from the political turbulence all too often resulting from religious controversies, by encouraging rulers and ruled alike to govern their lives instead by the putatively "certain" or worry-free advice his Preface has been promoting all along as the viable alternative to political religion. Correspondingly, he steers them away from dependence on "fortune," where the superstitious have in effect misplaced their trust while believing themselves to be soliciting and awaiting the favors of some personal God or gods.[36]

Even so, it is remarkable how little Spinoza has actually said in a general way about the certain advice they are being led to seek, as opposed to how much he has said about the superstition they are being advised to shun. For some reason, he leaves readers to learn from him piecemeal. He limits himself to providing particular illustrations of more or less—often less—reliable advice. Besides the advice he has just given about how to safeguard religious freedom in a republic, Spinoza's illustrations include several examples we have already looked at in passing: Alexander's turning and returning to prophets, the founding of political religions, the vulgarization of Christianity, Spinoza's autobiographical account of how he came to reinterpret the Bible, and the apodictic account he has just given about the origins of political life. A provisional understanding of what he means by "certain counsel" must be distilled from these six examples.

What do they have in common? They are all historical or developmental accounts. In each case, Spinoza replaces a naive or worried view of a potentially worrisome situation—the outcome of a war, the superstitious character of organized religion, Christian persecutions, what the Bible says, the goal of political life—with an account of how that situation grew to be as worrisome as it is. Knowing step-by-step what made that situation suggests in principle how it might be unmade or remade.[37] It implies that worriers may have some control over the conditions that have made them

[35] Recall, however, that Ch. 14 of the *Treatise* will supply them with a list of approved dogmas by which the public actions of the various sects may be tested for legitimacy—though the test is problematic, as we have already seen.

[36] From this point of view, the *Treatise* may be seen as a theological extension of Machiavelli's advice to rely on one's own arms rather than on fortune. See especially Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Ch. 6-7, 25 (trans. H. C. Mansfield, Jr. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985], 21-33, 98-101); *Discourses on Livy* II.1, III.31 (trans. H. C. Mansfield, Jr., and N. Tarcov [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 126, 283f.).

[37] Cf Francis Bacon, *New Organon*, Pt. I, Aphs. 3, 129 (Anderson, 39, 117-19).

worry in the first place. With some further effort on their part, they may be in a position to change those conditions, to make them less worrisome. That prospect, in itself, serves to dissipate worry somewhat.

The order in which Spinoza has presented his illustrations, moreover, does not seem to be haphazard. Each new illustration in the series includes an example of advice followed which is, on the whole, more reliable than that of the previous illustration. Least reliable was the example of the anxiety-ridden Alexander's following his own advice in consulting prognosticators at the Gates of Susa. More reliable was the advice followed by those kings who co-opted superstition in the interest of their own political stability—though at the cost, at least in the case of the Turks, of freedom of opinion. Christianity, next in the series of Spinoza's illustrations, may be said to be an improvement over the Turks by reason of its tolerance of philosophical controversies (at least if Spinoza is correct in claiming that the Bible itself tolerates them); yet it was inadvisable according to Spinoza for Christianity to have let itself be so beset by such controversies as to have betrayed its original teaching of love for all human beings by becoming a persecuting religion. As for the Bible itself as newly interpreted by means of the method Spinoza recommends imposing on it, the view that it teaches only justice and charitableness is seen to be a marked improvement over the various philosophically-inspired interpretations that have underwritten Christian persecutions; but as we have also seen, Spinoza is unable to establish with complete certainty his contrasting claim that the Bible contains a simple moral teaching that is at bottom permissive rather than prohibitive. More reliable than any of the foregoing, it seems, is the apodictic account Spinoza has just offered concerning the character of political life—as the calculated surrender of one's individual freedom with a view to enhancing one's prospects as part of a political society. This last, in turn, is the putatively reliable basis for Spinoza's formula for combining stable political sovereignty with religious freedom—that is, his culminating advice that those who hold the highest power exercise that power to regulate subjects' deeds where necessary but leave their words alone.

Still, the most one could conclude from Spinoza's having presented the notion of certain advice by means of those six illustrations is that any one piece of advice is only *comparatively* more reliable than another for freeing its practitioner from worry. Absolute freedom from worry does not seem to be entirely within the *Treatise*'s purview—an observation that is compatible with Spinoza's initial supposition that superstition is likely to persist in political life. It follows that Spinoza's political argument here has the character of a series of calculations or projections whose results are never guaranteed with absolute finality. Each piece of advice is infinitely revisable. Each may bring with it new worries—though these may be minor compared to the original worry that brought the need for advice to begin with—and so each may in turn call for progressively new and more refined advice.

**The Need for Philosophy**

We are now in a position to resolve Spinoza's apparent inconsistencies in his repeated references to philosophy near the end of the Preface, by recalling his most obvious references to philosophy earlier on (P.6.1-2, with 4.7-8). Besides arguing that

the Bible itself is neutral or indifferent on the question of the role of philosophy in human life, Spinoza has also drawn attention to the Aristotelians and Platonists said to have infiltrated post-biblical theology.[38] Since all Christian theologians are thereby said to make use of some Aristotelian or Platonic doctrine or other whether they know it or not, it follows that those doctrines and their authors are what ultimately stand in the way of the proper recovery of the original, unphilosophical meaning of the biblical text according to Spinoza, its simple teaching of justice and charitableness. Hence Aristotle and Plato and their theological epigones must be the true target of Spinoza's war against religious superstition—given, at any rate, that an all-out war against superstition itself is not winnable. Only by discrediting the assumption among theologians that Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy is helpful for understanding the Bible[39] and replacing that assumption with advice that includes as its centerpiece the results of his own method of reading the Bible, can Spinoza persuade his reader that both theology and philosophy are better off in the circumstances if they leave each other alone.

But if so, then the "Philosopher reader," the "Philosophers" and the "others who would philosophize more freely" are all identical, so far as the *Treatise* is concerned. They are theologians, or else theologically sophisticated Christians, who can be brought to share Spinoza's own dissatisfaction with the discrepancy between Christian love and Christian persecutions, and so are open to his suggestion as outlined in the Preface and reinforced by the accumulated details of the *Treatise* that the cause of that discrepancy is the improper intrusion of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy into theology.

Yet recall that such readers are, from the Preface's point of view, only partly philosophical. They are also partly, perhaps even mostly, superstitious. To that extent, so Spinoza has been telling us, they are readers who are led more by their worries than by their reason. Hence Spinoza's final words in the Preface try to free them from any particular worry over the possibly impious effects of his having published the *Treatise* to begin with.

Such is the point of the Preface's concluding invitation for readers to examine the *Treatise* as a whole and let Spinoza know (though he has published it anonymously) if they find anything in it that is at odds with the country's laws or stands in the way of the common welfare (P.7.1-2). He knows that he is a "human being," he says, and "could have erred." Yet he has "been painstakingly careful" not to err. Assuming he has been successful in avoiding errors, he adds, whatever he has written "would altogether answer to the laws of the fatherland, to piety, and to good morals." Spinoza's concluding words here are quite ambiguous. To "answer" to the laws, for example, could mean either to obey them or to criticize them with a view to improving them. Likewise, to ask his readers to look for anything he has said which would undermine the established laws or challenge putatively salutary practices could mean either to solicit a stamp of approval or to stimulate public debate. Also, if Spinoza's

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[38] See also 13.1 7, with 1.10.3, 5.4.20, 7.11.21-22, as well as the *Treatise*'s extensive critique of Maimonides, 1 10 3, 5.4.19-22, 7.11.21-39, 10.2 1-6, 15.1.1-35.

[39] Recall, however, note 15, above

words themselves are unerring, or insofar as they are, it may be that he has meant all of the above. But if this last is indeed the case, then it suggests that the *Treatise* as a whole has been written so as to illustrate the public benefits of the very freedom of philosophizing proposed and illustrated by his argument. Only in a liberal democracy conforming to the conditions he describes could one routinely criticize laws publicly while still obeying them, and receive a stamp of approval precisely for stimulating public debate in a philosophical manner, as he has meant to do.

Arguably, the possible errors that Spinoza is hoping to have avoided (but is evidently not sure) do not refer simply to the theological or political indiscretions to which his freedom of philosophizing may be prone and which would accordingly be subject to moral or legal sanctions. They may also refer to possible technical errors in his proffered advice in the argument of the *Treatise*, which would then need to be corrected by means of improved methods of solving the theological or political worries that his errors will then have left unsolved. If so, Spinoza seems to be freely admitting his own fallibility. To understand why he might choose to do so here, we must keep in mind what we have already seen to be the infinitely revisable character of his calculations in formulating the "certain counsel" that the Preface itself has been offering, in effect, since its opening sentence. To the extent to which Spinoza will nevertheless have persuaded his readers that his argument, all told, addresses their worries better than the prevailing theologies and even better than the biblical text itself when looked at apart from his method, those readers will have made progress in forsaking superstition and embracing instead the philosophical alternative he has been making available for them all along.

## Spinoza's Alienation from Religious Orthodoxy

Closely connected with the difficulty just discussed—concerning Spinoza's intended addressee—is the second difficulty left over from our initital attempts to fathom his personal self-disclosures in the *Treatise*. It concerns the reasons for his deliberate alienation from both Judaism and Christianity. Consider the following further observation. Spinoza's term "Philosopher reader" is not merely a well-chosen description of the reader of the *Treatise* as such. Ironically, given the claim we have already seen him make in the Preface to the effect that post-biblical theology has been corrupted by the intrusion of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, the term also fits any and all pious readers of the Bible who stand under the influence of that theology. Such readers are, without being fully aware of it, in the habit of reading the Bible so as to confirm this or that philosophical, or philosophically derived, teaching. Accordingly, they fail to absorb the biblical teaching in its pure form. Chapters 1-15 of the *Treatise* are, among other things, Spinoza's elaborate attempt to disabuse its readers of the habit in question. For that reason, as I have already suggested, those same fifteen Chapters, rather than any set of sources external to the *Treatise*, provide the most promising vantage point for viewing Spinoza's self-imposed or self-maintained distance from his pious contemporaries.

Keeping in mind Spinoza's claim to orderliness in the *Treatise*, let us try to survey

that distance as found in the theological argument of Chapters 1-15 itself. Suppose we were to start by looking for distance markers that any theologically alert reader might notice. We could simply pick out a plausible sequence of Spinoza's own, readily understood statements on theologically related topics, while temporarily disregarding the *Treatise*'s further reasoning in support of those statements. The resulting sequence would resemble a series of aphorisms—like those of Spinoza's philosophical predecessor Francis Bacon, for example, or, for that matter, such successors as Lessing, Marx, and Nietzsche. One such excerpt per Chapter would do for the moment, given that Spinoza's claim to orderliness extends not just to the sequence of Chapters as a whole but also to each Chapter in turn. Our task would then be to comment on how each excerpt fits both within the orderly argument of its own Chapter and within the orderly sequence of Chapters.

What follow, then, are Spinoza's theological "aphorisms" (as we shall call them), together with our commentary on each one. Since Spinoza offers his *Treatise* as a philosophical answer to the question of how to avail ourselves of certain or worry-free advice, our comments will take their bearings by that question too. We shall look to see how Spinoza's "aphorisms" point to the pattern of argument illustrated in advance by the Preface, which has provided a set of examples of increasingly certain—though on reflection revisable—proposals for resolving various theologico-political worries (or, to speak more philosophically, questions) that have come up in religious and political life. If Spinoza's argument in the body of his *Treatise* runs true to form, then we may expect to see a similar pattern in each of the Chapters under consideration: confrontation with a worry (or question), followed by a proposal for rethinking that worry (or question) so as to reduce it to a manageable certainty, followed by a review leading to a new confrontation with any leftover worries (or questions).

Because Chapter, or step, 1 anticipates where Spinoza is going in all the remaining Chapters, we will examine the pertinent features of its argument in somewhat more detail than the others'.

### Step 1: Prophecy or Revelation as Non-Science

> . . .it is to be noted first and foremost that the Jews never make mention of intermediate or particular causes, and do not care about them; but because of religion and piety, or (as the vulgar are used to saying) devotion, they always have recourse to God. For if, for example, they have made money in business, they say it has been bestowed on them by God; if they long for anything to happen, they say God has disposed their heart; and if they even think something, they say God has said it to them. [1.5.5]

Spinoza intervenes in his own argument in Chapter 1, to advise against speaking about the Bible except on the basis of the clear evidence of the biblical text (1.5.4). He qualifies his advice with an observation—what we have just cited as our first "aphorism"—about the Jews' unscientific manner of speaking. In the immediate context, Spinoza seems to be referring to Jews as writers of the Bible, though in the

larger context he may also be referring to Jews (and Christians) as readers of the Bible. Biblical writers, he observes, are indifferent to causes in the scientific sense of the term. They often fail to narrate the "intermediate or particular" details necessary for explaining the matters found in the biblical narratives. For example, they speak of business profits as gifts from God, of human longings as God's disposing the human heart, and of thoughts in the minds of human beings as something God tells them. Their way of explaining tends to fall short of the knowable particulars. Biblical writers are indiscriminate in ascribing to God anything and everything that happens to them. They are devout rather than scientific. As for the examples that Spinoza has just mentioned, his way of mentioning them reinforces the very point he is making. He does not mention any biblical texts in particular. He generalizes so as to require us to investigate or recollect the texts on our own, if we wish. His generalized examples, like the biblical texts he is criticizing, do not supply the full details to which they refer. They leave our desire to know unsatisfied. Spinoza's loosely imitating the Bible's manner of speaking here illustrates in the reader's own idiom, and not just via the biblical Hebrew sprinkled liberally throughout his subsequent theological argument, how the Bible falls short of the sure knowledge pious readers may offhand be inclined to take it for.

Spinoza's advice about how to read the Bible, or rather how not to read it, occurs at the transition between the Chapter 1's introductory remarks, stating the plan and defining the terms of its argument, and the detailed execution of that argument (1.1.1-5.6, 6.1-21.5). The introductory remarks have to do with knowledge of God as provided by prophets and others in general. The details, etc., have to do with such knowledge as is found in the Bible in particular. What we have called our first "aphorism" points to a gap between knowledge of God and the biblical source—a gap that by Spinoza's standards is fillable, if at all, only by the further considerations he brings forward in Chapter 1.

The introductory remarks begin with two definitions. Prophecy or revelation is defined as "the certain knowledge of some matter revealed by God to human beings" (1.1.1). A prophet, then, is "one who interprets the revealed things of God to those who are unable to have the certain knowledge of the matters revealed by God and so can only embrace the matters being revealed by mere faith" (1.1.2). Spinoza treats prophecy, the subject of his first definition, in Chapter 1; he postpones treating prophets, the subject of his second definition, till Chapter 2. Chapter 1 goes on to draw conclusions that are explicitly said to "follow" from the definition of prophecy (1.2.2). In this way, Chapter 1 resembles, say, Part I of the *Ethics*, where many propositions are likewise deduced from a few axioms and definitions stipulated up front. In the *Treatise* as in the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues "geometrically" or (to use the *Treatise*'s word) "mathematically,"[40] i.e., deductively. Nevertheless he makes a point of inserting the aforementioned advice against misreading the Bible into his deductive argument here. Such arguments, it seems, do not stand alone. We must therefore face the question of how the deductively ordered features of Chapter 1—or any

[40] 15 1.57, 58. In contrast, the Bible's own teaching is not subject to "mathematical" demonstration; cf. 2.3.8, 5.1, 8 9, 14.1 53, 15.1.45, 56, 60 with 11.1.55.

Chapter—combine with Spinoza's argument as a whole.

For a preliminary answer, let us compare the opening statement of the Preface, where Spinoza does not argue deductively so much as he sets forth the occasion for his having written the *Treatise*. "If human beings could regulate all their affairs with certain counsel," the Preface begins, "or if fortune were always favorable to them..." The Preface begins with a hypothetical statement containing a disjunction in its protasis, not a categorical statement containing a simple definition as in Chapter 1. The obvious similarity between the Preface's opening statement and Chapter 1's is their common subject-matter rather than their logical form or function. Both speak of certainty—the Preface of the desirability of certain advice, Chapter 1 of the revelation of certain knowledge. As for certain advice, the Preface as a whole implies that, as things stand, it remains something of an oxymoron. The one-sidedness and incompleteness of the various examples that occupy the Preface suggest that advice in religious and political matters has so far always been more or less randomly obtained and, to that extent, uncertain. Improved certainty therefore requires reflection on the conditions of its own possibility. In other words, it demands prior deliberation or "caution" with a view to arriving at a method for directing and regulating our minds so that we may act more efficiently and confidently. Still, the Preface also assumes that the practical success of any method cannot be known at the outset, given that superstition and the religious and political passions surrounding it are an ever present obstacle. Success in availing ourselves of more certain advice, then, can only come about by first seeing how far we might be able to circumvent that obstacle by channeling or redirecting those passions. Such is the theologico-political task of the *Treatise* as a whole. Not method per se, but cautious reflections on the possibility of method in the passion-driven circumstances of private and public life occasion Spinoza's initial departure from the theologico-political orthodoxy he inherits.

Differently stated, the *Treatise* is a thought-experiment to discover how to control the religious and political passions that stand in the way of "the freedom of philosophizing," so as to be able to supply philosophically or scientfically informed—i.e., more certain—advice. It is a freely chosen project, whose success is not known at the outset but is knowable only if and as it is undertaken. The geometry-like definitions that begin Chapter 1, together with the deductive inferences that follow from them, mark the beginning of Spinoza's self-conscious attempt to execute that project.

Accordingly, Chapter 1 divides into three main parts: a drawing of general conclusions from Spinoza's quasi-geometrical definition of prophecy or revelation; a confirmation of those conclusions by means of extensive evidence from the biblical text; and a review of those same conclusions, which are now said to be able to be affirmed "without misgiving," i.e., with certainty (1.1.1-5.6, 6.1-21.5, 22.1-24.8). Spinoza's review boils down to the single conclusion that so-called prophetic or revealed knowledge is essentially a product of the prophets' imaginations, that is, knowledge of a lower rank than science and so of a lesser certainty than scientific certainty. The stage is thereby set for Chapter 2, which treats the prophets' lower-rank certainty as such. Meanwhile Chapter 1 not only treats what the biblical prophets

knew for certain, but does so in a manner that purports to be certain, i.e., orderly or methodical. It is or claims to be an orderly discussion of order—or at least of as much orderliness as may be discovered in the certainties claimed by the prophets. As Spinoza says repeatedly, biblical prophecies conspicuously lack orderliness: they are dreamlike, mysterious, hieroglyphic, etc. (1.8.5, 9.15, 13.1). What then lets Spinoza claim more orderliness in understanding the biblical prophecies than is apparent in them as they stand? The enhanced orderliness he seeks would not be possible unless it were somehow introduced or imposed by Spinoza himself.

Consider, in this regard, the three preliminary conclusions Spinoza deduces from his quasi-geometrical definition of prophecy or revelation as the certain knowledge revealed by God to human beings. First it follows, rather startlingly perhaps, that natural knowledge can also be called prophecy: both can be called "divine," he says, since we know anything only to the extent that the knowledge is dictated to us by God's nature insofar as we share in it "objectively" (i.e., as a concept in our minds) and by the laws that follow from God's nature; prophetic knowledge differs only in extending beyond the limits of that knowledge as well. As if to reassure the reader that this first conclusion does not entirely abolish the distinction between prophecy and other forms of knowledge, Spinoza draws a second conclusion: namely, scientists—whom he calls the "propagators" of natural knowledge—are not prophets after all, since unlike prophets they are not the exclusive bearers of the knowledge they pass on to others, but what they know can also be known first-hand by others. Finally, Spinoza adds a third conclusion, which again seems to be as much about non-prophetic knowledge as about prophecy or revelation: namely, the "first cause" of divine revelation is not God per se but our own mind, since our ability to conceive "the idea and nature of God" and act in accordance with it is the basis of our being able to frame laws for both explaining nature and governing human life. Evidently there is more to Spinoza's original definition of prophecy than first meets the eye. From a definition whose center of gravity is certain knowledge, Spinoza draws a series of conclusions which shifts that center from prophecy or revelation as such into the human mind. We seem headed toward the notion that, despite first appearances, prophecy or revelation is at its core a natural or human phenomenon, subject to explanation and possible governance accordingly. Such indeed is the overall drift of the *Treatise*'s theological argument. Spinoza seems to have chosen his original definition freely with that drift in mind.

Like the results of the quasi-geometrical argument of the first part of Chapter 1, so too the results of the empirical argument of its second part look, on reflection, to be premeditated. Spinoza surrounds his actual gathering of evidence by, on the one hand, his preliminary advice about how to read the Bible and, on the other hand, a retrospective summary of what has been made "transparent" by that evidence (1.5.1-6, 6.1-20-27, 21.1-5). His preliminary advice is—to recall our first "aphorism"—that we not attribute anything to the prophets except what they explicitly say. His retrospective summary is that the "phrases of Scripture" which attribute God's Spirit to the prophets mean nothing more than that the prophets' words and images were the by-product of an extremely pious imagination shaped by the psychological fact that

they took the Mosaic laws very seriously. Eye-opening as the theological implications of this last conclusion may be, Spinoza claims no more than to have derived it from the textual evidence properly construed. At the same time, we seem to have moved even further from our original theological starting-point. That this latest move is continuous with the one begun earlier not only logically but also theologically (or rather anti-theologically) is suggested by a second look at Spinoza's transitional warning that introduces the textual evidence itself. Not everything the Bible says is to be taken as revealed knowledge, he has advised, but only what is explicitly said to be such or what follows from the details of the narrative as being such. This advice is based in turn on the aforementioned observation about the Jews' manner of speaking which was to be noted "first and foremost." As the basis of his advice against mistaking pious habits of speech for actual revelations, Spinoza's observation seems methodologically uncontroversial. Nevertheless his way of formulating it is strikingly imprecise: "the Jews never make mention of intermediate or particular causes..." Among the ambiguities that result are these: By "the Jews," does he mean the biblical speakers or narrators, or post-biblical Jews? By "never make mention," does he mean in the biblical text itself, as might be established with some precision, or in common speech, as seems ascertainable only anecdotally? Finally, by the putatively unmentioned "intermediate or particular causes," does he mean that the speakers are utterly unaware of such causes, or that they might be aware of them but only tacitly or implicitly? That these ambiguities are not resolved right away does not exclude the likelihood that Spinoza understands them fully for what they are and that, along with similarly expressed ambiguities, they permeate the logical and rhetorical fabric of the *Treatise*. Again and again in the *Treatise*, Spinoza has an ambiguous way of getting at something precise.

In its precise meaning, our first "aphorism" is equivalent to a shorthand description not just of pious habits of speech broadly understood, but of Spinoza's scientific approach to the biblical text strictly understood. It is a statement of methodological intent, as is indicated by the precise meaning of the term "phrases of Scripture" in Spinoza's retrospective summary (1.21.1). By "phrases of Scripture," he turns out to mean individual verses or passages containing simple narrative or imperative statements. These are the biblical sound-bites, as we have already characterized them, from which Spinoza's biblical criticism is constructed. Soon he will call them *sententiae*—the Latin term has a grammatical meaning, "sentences," as well as a theological or political meaning, "tenets." In the present Chapter, his citing of biblical statements falls into two main sets: first, statements containing revelations in the form of either plain words or figures of speech or both, where the revelations may be seen to be either true, in the sense of referring to something outside the prophet's imagination, or not (1.6.1-9.16, 10.1-11.1, 12.1-16.1); second, statements indicating the intra-biblical meaning of the expression "Spirit of God" (1.16.2-21.5). From the first set of statements Spinoza infers that, among the prophets, only Moses had true revelations. From the second set, which illustrate the various meanings-in-use for the expression "Spirit of God" via those for "Spirit" and "of God," Spinoza is able to corroborate his psychologizing conclusion about the purely imaginative character of prophecies

other than Moses'. Still, we cannot help noticing in hindsight that this last conclusion seems to have been predetermined by, among other things, Spinoza's rather limited selection of evidence: by invoking the expression "Spirit of God," which the Hebrew Bible itself never applies to Moses, Spinoza elaborates the distinction between Moses' revelations and the other prophets' by what appears to be little more than an argument from silence. To see more clearly how Spinoza's narrowly focused way of citing biblical statements both conforms to the methodological procedures he imposes and furthers his larger theologico-political project, let us follow in some detail a thread of his argument which emerges in the course of his discussion of the first set of statements he cites, those said to contain revelations in plain words only (1.7.1-9.16).

The first statement cited is Exodus 25:22, where Moses hears God promise to meet him privately in front of the ark of the Tabernacle and tell him "the Laws he wanted to prescribe to the Hebrews" (1.7.1-3). Spinoza infers that the voice Moses heard must have been a true one, since Moses never failed to find God ready and waiting for him there whenever he wanted. Spinoza does not provide any further evidence for this last premise, though it may well rest on nothing more than a straightforward comparison with pertinent statements elsewhere in the biblical narratives. Still, he does not bother to cite those statements. A biblically literate reader might wonder why. A plausible answer is that, by limiting himself entirely to the immediate evidence and not complicating matters either textually or theologically, Spinoza offers this first inference as a simple model for the interpretation of all subsequently cited statements. If so, his purpose must be practical as much as theoretical. Spinoza presents his strictly exegetical argument here in the manner of the scientists to whom he has referred earlier, whose claims to knowledge, unlike the claims of prophets or theologians, can be thoroughly double-checked. In so doing, he invites his reader to see how far what looks like a potentially controversial theological claim can be replaced by a methodologically more certain one.

Spinoza's more than exegetical intent is also evident in the second statement he cites. At I Samuel 3:21, in a situation analogous to Moses', the young Samuel hears God speaking to him at the sanctuary in Shiloh (1.8.1-2). Spinoza elaborates the passage to show how the two situations prove dissimilar. He introduces his discussion by saying, "I would suspect that the voice by which God called Samuel was a true one." Yet he proceeds to argue that such suspicion is unwarranted for two reasons. First, he says, "we are compelled" to distinguish between Moses' prophecy and those of the other prophets. Spinoza's brief expression here leaves it open whether "we are compelled" on theological or merely textual grounds. Only after he has cited almost his entire list of passages showing that prophecies occur either in plain words or in figures of speech or both, does he conclude his list by citing Numbers 12:6-7 and Deuteronomy 34:10, the very passages he could easily have cited in the first place to distinguish Moses' prophecy, as the only "true" prophecy, from the others' (1.13.1-2). He even suggests that, had he cited either of these same passages before, all the others would have been unnecessary. Perhaps Spinoza is being remarkably careless here. On the other hand, perhaps his need to cite just those passages he does cite and in the order he cites them becomes clear from the warp and woof of his discussion of them.

Such is indeed the case with Spinoza's second reason for not suspecting that Samuel heard a true voice. Namely, Samuel kept confusing God's voice with his priestly mentor Eli's, "which he was very used to hearing." As if to underscore Samuel's psychological confusion, but also to indicate an odd likeness between Samuel and himself, Spinoza adds that, "having been called three times by God, he suspected [*sic*] that he was being called by Eli" (1.8.3). Samuel and Spinoza are alike, it seems, in being susceptible to false suspicions—Spinoza falsely suspecting that the voice Samuel heard was real, Samuel falsely suspecting that it was Eli's. Spinoza skips the rest of the narrative, where Samuel is advised by Eli that the voice he heard must have been God's since it was not Eli's. From a strictly exegetical point of view, Spinoza's omission seems traceable to his tacit recognition that Eli's advice, though persuasive to Samuel, remains open to doubt in not taking into account that the voice Samuel heard resembled Eli's. Spinoza's claim that God's voice could only have come from Samuel's imagination is closer to the evidence, yet only if the evidence excludes the further possibility that God could have sounded like Eli had he wanted to—an exclusion Spinoza addresses only implicitly and only in a subsequent discussion of something else he "once suspected," in connection with the fourth and final biblical passage he cites concerning prophecies occurring in plain words (1.9.2). Meanwhile it looks as if the common thread that unifies Spinoza's entire discussion of this particular passage and links it with others he cites concerning revelations in plain words is the question of how to eliminate false suspicions, i.e., unnecessary worries or doubts. Spinoza's general answer, as we have already seen (and as Ch. 7 will spell out more precisely), involves reducing the biblical text so far as possible to statements about whose meaning it is no longer necessary to have suspicions, and then piecing together the larger meaning of the text from these so as to keep further suspicions at bay. Scrupulously adhering to this method would, by Spinoza's lights, reduce our need to suffer from theological and/or textual uncertainties. It would minimize our having to say "I would suspect..." At the same time, Spinoza seems to have reported his old suspicions on the supposition that we would not be convinced of the advantage of his method for minimizing suspicions unless we were first induced to have them.

The third statement Spinoza cites, Genesis 20:6 concerning God's speaking to the Canaanite king Abimelech in his dreams, is remarkable for the brevity of Spinoza's discussion of it, especially in contrast with the lengthy discussion that follows concerning the Decalogue in both its versions (Ex. 20:2-17, Dt. 5:6-21), which ends the list of passages Spinoza cites to show prophecies occurring in plain words, but which requires him at the same time to cite several more passages so as to dispel what he "once suspected" about the Decalogue itself (1.8.3-5, 9.1-15). Since the brevity of what Spinoza says about Genesis 20:6 serves to set off his lengthy discussion of the Decalogue, let us look at his old suspicion about the latter first.

What Spinoza once suspected about the Decalogue was the traditional Jewish opinion that God's voice as heard by the Israelites at Mount Sinai was not a true voice but only a wordless sound (the Hebrew word for "voice" also means "sound") and that the Israelites meanwhile perceived the laws of the Decalogue purely by means of the mind. Spinoza was inclined to favor this opinion since he saw that the words of the

Decalogue in Exodus vary from those in Deuteronomy. Given that God only spoke once, Spinoza inferred that what the Decalogue means to say is not the words themselves but the "tenets" implied by the words—the *sententiae* in the theological rather than the grammatical sense. He tells us why he later changed his mind: "unless we want to impugn the force of Scripture," he says somewhat ambiguously, "it is to be altogether granted that the Israelites heard a true voice." (1.9.14) Spinoza's ambiguity here turns on what is meant by "the force of Scripture." At first glance, it could mean the literal sense of the biblical text, as is suggested by his proceeding to cite a parallel passage, "Face to face did God speak with you" (Dt. 4:5), which connotes something like two human beings speaking to each other by means of their bodies. But this line of interpretation simply raises the further question of whether, despite what Spinoza has asserted earlier about pious Jewish habits of speech and their apparent indifference to intermediate causes, the biblical author is nevertheless using the expression "face to face" metaphorically rather than literally. The metaphorical interpretation is defended above all by Maimonides (*Guide of the Perplexed* II.33, with I.37), whom Spinoza seems to be engaging in a behind-the-scenes fight. In a pattern we have already seen taking shape in the *Treatise*—of letting a philosophic issue first emerge as an ambiguity that later turns out to have been anticipated so that Spinoza can eventually resolve it on his own terms—Spinoza puts off resolving this issue, or even mentioning Maimonides' name, until he has laid a firmer or more certain basis for doing so.[41]

All the same, a second glance at Spinoza's expression "the force of Scripture" finds him already laying that basis, in the words that immediately follow about why he changed his mind: the Israelites' hearing of a true voice, he now says, "is to be altogether granted." In other words, the reason why Spinoza now believes that the voice of the Decalogue must have been a "truly created" voice is that the passage in question is written so as to have what it says be "altogether granted," i.e., simply believed or unhesitatingly obeyed, even or especially by those of the meanest intellectual capacity, whom it would be unnecessary and even counterproductive to address with the sort of subtlety Maimonides and others attribute to the biblical text. This line of interpretation, to be sure, begs the further question of whether everyone present at Mount Sinai, or alternatively everyone addressed by the biblical author, fits Spinoza's low-level description—a question he waits to take up in earnest till Chapter 2. Meanwhile only after promising to give in Chapter 8 of the *Treatise* a cause consistent with his overall approach for why the two wordings of the Decalogue differ (see 8.1.87-97), does he admit that his argument so far has not been adequate. The leftover difficulty, as Spinoza now states it, has to do with how a voice merely created by God could "express the essence or existence of God" to those who had no prior knowledge of God (a version of the same difficulty that surfaced momentarily during Spinoza's earlier discussion of God's voice as heard by Samuel). Spinoza's theologically shocking

[41] At 1.14.3-16.1, Spinoza contrasts Moses' communicating with God "face to face" with Christ's communicating "mind to mind," though he is quick to warn that he is not speaking of "what some Churches state" about Christ, and confesses that he does not grasp it. Eventually he accounts for the differences between Moses' and Christ's theological teachings with reference to the strictly political circumstances occasioning them; see 19.1 10-22, with 2 10.6-9, 4.4.22-31, 5.1.13-14, 21-23, 3.1-11, 7.5 8-14, 11 1.2, 13-36, 12.2.28, and the argument of Ch. 19 as a whole.

though methodologically consistent solution to this difficulty is, in short, that the Law of Moses does not teach the incorporeal, imageless essence of God as such but only enjoins obedience to God with the help of forceful anthropomorphic imagery. Although Spinoza makes an effort to blunt this shock by citing a number of further statements as prooftexts, only in Chapter 2 and following will he go on to defend his answer more fully by gradually developing the definition of the prophet first announced in Chapter 1. On the one hand, prophets thereby appeal rhetorically to the crude anthromorphisms of the Israelites for strictly political purposes, to secure their obedience to the law. On the other hand, in so doing the prophets are also said to adumbrate the teaching that the divine law is engraved not in stone but on the heart, i.e., in the human mind—a teaching that, in Spinoza's hands, turns out to fit rather neatly with the account of purely natural knowledge he has touched on while first drawing out the implications of his definition of prophecy at the beginning of Chapter 1.[42] All in all, we continue to be struck by how an argument that pays such close attention to theological nuances ends up being so blatantly untheological.

Returning to the third biblical passage Spinoza cites, Genesis 20:6, occurring as it does between his elaborate discussion of the passage concerning Samuel and his elaborate discussion of the Decalogue, we may say that Spinoza's very brevity in discussing it seems instructive. He says nothing, for example, about the occasion within the Genesis narrative for Abimelech's hearing God's voice in a dream—about the need to protect Abraham's wife whom Abimelech had taken into his harem on hearing from Abraham himself that she was his sister, or about Abraham's related worries about the moral abominations of the nations then living in the Promised Land, whose lands God had promised to his descendants on that account. Why then, of all passages that could have been cited, is Abimelech's on Spinoza's list? What if anything, besides fitting the formal definition of prophecy, does Abimelech have in common with Moses, Samuel, and again Moses? Perhaps the correct answer here is that all three were or became prophetic rulers; but beyond that, especially given Spinoza's silence, a better answer seems to be that they have little if anything in common. Differently stated, formally or "mathematically" the biblical passage Spinoza cites concerning Abimelech fits with those concerning Moses and Samuel, but substantively or empirically the fit seems forced; and if we may generalize from the viewpoint of Spinoza's new and more certain biblical hermeneutic, the same may be said about the Bible as a whole: its passages do not necessarily fit together smoothly; their orderliness is problematic. As part of his overall project, Spinoza looks to refit the biblical passages into a whole that is less problematic. He therefore starts by construing and reconfiguring those passages as isolated statements. In Spinoza's hands, the biblical books fall apart as books, so that it is left to him to put them back together somewhat mechanically by a design of his own free choosing.[43] The theological upshot of this procedure is that

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[42] Cf. 5.1 5-9, 12 1.3-6, with the argument of Ch. 4-5 of the *Treatise.*

[43] Here Spinoza's procedure stands in contrast to Maimonides' in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which the *Theologico-Political Treatise* roughly parodies in biblical matters. Maimonides too acknowledges the possibly problematic fit among the component parts of the biblical text, given that prophecy is somehow bound up with the prophets' imaginations; but though Maimonides' approach like Spinoza's is often microscopic, his way of seeing the text's component parts cuts across Spinoza's Instead of "sentences," Maimonides speaks, on the one hand, of

insofar as what we have come to call biblical morality depends on the teaching of the biblical books as a whole (or at least as putative wholes) rather than on statements taken in isolation (cf. 14.2.3a), Spinoza's hermeneutical preliminaries preview the *Treatise*'s redesigning of biblical morality as well—of which we have just caught a glimpse during what we may call his value-free treatment of Abimelech.

In the end, of course, there are limits to Spinoza's possible theological (or anti-theological) innovations. He cannot reorder the biblical canon as a corpus of books. He is too late—the canon is already complete. But he can, and does, reorder how we are to read (or perhaps misread) that canon. The freedom he takes in rereading it is another way of describing his freedom of philosophizing as it pervades his theological argument. We have already anticipated how, in Chapter 14, Spinoza will propose seven dogmas that are to serve as a civil religion to which devotees of all biblical sects can pledge allegiance in common. Methodologically, Spinoza's dogmas could only be arrived at from his first having reduced the biblical books to their constituent statements, afterwards gathered and reorganized according to subject-matter. In this respect, the seven dogmas are the most universal statements in the sense that they are the most frequently repeated (cf. 7.3.1, 5.1-7). What they share has little to do with their content except coincidentally. Their claim to higher authority is that they populate the biblical text most densely according to Spinoza's (or anyone's) numerical survey. Yet while slicing up the Bible into statements as Spinoza does may well reveal a number of patterns in its artificially exposed cross-section, it sacrifices the natural contours of the text as visible to any observant reader. After all, there is no evidence in the statements themselves that the principle guiding the composition of the text has to do with their being repeated numerically in proportion to their importance theologically. Spinoza's assumption to that effect is strictly *ad hoc*, i.e., freely chosen. If not quite true to the text as it presents itself, however, his advice that we ought to construe the text in that way is, by Spinoza's own lights, not just clever but useful and public-spirited. It lets the various biblical religions reach an otherwise elusive consensus based on the certainty of the mathematical. Competing sects can dispute the ultimate theological implications of Spinoza's top-seven statements, but not that those seven occur most frequently. Enlightened sectarians—the *Treatise*'s "Philosopher" readers who are receptive to Spinoza's practical advice, even if not to his full philosophical argument—can then agree on where to agree and where to disagree about what the Bible says, assuming of course that Spinoza's numbers are accurate and that, all things considered, numbers ought to rule.

Spinoza's recalibrating of the biblical text may be described as a subtle feat of creative engineering. It is supported by the text in the sense of being tolerated by it rather than mandated by it. Yet to remind ourselves that his free-minded approach also has the serious aim of redirecting Bible study to suit the requirements of a public life undisturbed by theological polemics, we may wish to adapt a figure of speech

"terms occurring in the books of prophecy" which are problematic for their being ambiguous (equivocal, derivative, amphibolous) and, on the other hand, of prophetic parables that are problematic for their being either puzzling or invisible, i.e., either unintelligible at first reading or unnoticed at first reading (*Guide* I, Introduction [trans. Pines, 5f.]). Maimonides' approach is congenial with the parts' of the text being parts of a prior whole; Spinoza's is not.

derived from his erstwhile mentor in matters of method, René Descartes.[44] Spinoza as biblical exegete is like an independent or rogue city-planner masquerading as a routine on-site inspector. Given the need to argue cautiously in a hostile theological environment, his *Treatise* is a rezoning, demolition and reconstruction program designed to look like a series of remedial spot-checks. Under what appear at first to be old-fashioned theological auspices, Spinoza's method works to construct a wall between two sectors. On the one side are the seven dogmas together with any or all narrative passages that serve to illustrate and clarify those dogmas, which may then function as a civil religion for the purpose of underwriting the moral behavior to which every decent citizen should subscribe in Spinoza's new dispensation. On the other side is the remainder of the biblical text, whose interpretation is to be left by law to everyone's private discretion so long as it is kept more or less private, i.e., voluntary. The "mathematical" definitions, inferences and formatting of evidence which Spinoza introduces in Chapter 1 supply the first draft of the structural-engineering blueprints for the theological component of his innovative project.

In sum, our first "aphorism" has to do with the difference between Spinoza's understanding of biblical prophecy and Jews' traditional self-understanding, i.e., with his downplaying the pious certainty evident in the latter's wholesale appeal to God as authorized or encouraged by the biblical books, in favor of the scientific certainty afforded by subjecting those books to a methodical redesign. The theological argument of the *Treatise* moves between these two kinds of certainty. Inasmuch as they are not the same, Spinoza's first step away from the religion of his contemporaries may be said to be his construing the certainty he attributes to biblical piety as a defective alternative to the certainty he attributes to scientific knowledge about biblical piety.

### Step 2: Scientific Understanding vs. Active Imagination

> Besides, so that God might reveal to Moses that, since the Israelites adored the calf, they became like the rest of the nations, he says in Exodus 33:2-3 that he will send an angel, that is, a being that will take care of the Israelites in the role of the supreme being,and that he is unwilling to be among them. For in this mode, he left Moses nothing by which it would be established for him that the Israelites were more favored by God than the other nations, whom God had also handed over into the care of other beings, or angels, as is established from verse 16 of the same chapter. [2.9.20]

Our second "aphorism" serves two functions in Spinoza's theological argument, according to whether it is to be taken retrospectively or prospectively. In the light of what Spinoza has already argued, it is part of a list of biblical statements designed to illustrate further how the prophets' certainty was based on their imagination. In the light of what Spinoza will argue in subsequent Chapters, it anticipates the fruits of the

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[44] See Descartes' reference to buildings and cities, etc., "composed of several pieces and made by the hands of diverse masters," as opposed to those worked on by "one .. alone"; *Discours de la méthode*, Pt. II, ¶ 1 (Heffernan, 26f.-27f.).

alternative, scientifically based certainty being promoted by the *Treatise* itself. Altogether, it contributes to refining the difference between the two kinds of certainty for Spinoza's reader, who has tended to confuse them.

Retrospectively, Spinoza's reference to God's promising Moses to send an angel to lead the Israelites in the aftermath of the golden calf incident (Ex. 32-34) shows that Moses' revelations did not differ from those of any other prophet in being accommodated to his own psychological temperament, peculiar imaginativeness and preconceived opinions. Chapter 2 begins by reiterating, as its axiomatic starting-point, that all prophets had active imaginations rather than powerful intellects (2.1.1). Spinoza infers that differences among revelations are to be traced entirely to the prophets' differing moods, fantasies and prejudices, and in no way to differing degrees of knowledge or wisdom. That the resulting certainties of the prophets had little to do with scientific knowledge, which is certain on its face, is said to follow from the fact that, for a prophet to be certain in cases where the revelation was novel or unprecedented, he needed alongside the vivid verbal and/or visual image a sign certifying what was being revealed to him—on the further supposition that God never deceived anyone whose spirit was "inclined solely to the equitable and the good" (2.4.5). A prophet's certainty was thus "moral," not "mathematical"; it was based on his sincere conviction that the revelation was meant to foster his own and his hearers' unswerving devotion to the divinely revealed law, rather than on the inherent "necessity" or intelligibility of what was being revealed (cf. 2.5.1). Applying the foregoing premises to Moses in particular yields the result that God's revelations during the golden calf incident were a function of Moses' personal amalgam of commonplace opinions about God: that God is affected by such emotions as compassion, gentleness and jealousy (so that Moses could ask God to forgive the Israelites for their sin of idol-worship, Ex. 34:6-7); that God is visible, though not shaped like other visible things (so that Moses could ask to see God's face, Ex. 33:18); that God delegates the care of nations to others acting on his behalf (i.e., to human leaders here called "angels," Ex. 33:2-3); and that God inhabits the heavens (so that Moses had to ascend a mountain to speak with God, Ex. 32:2-4).[45]

Prospectively, what is revealed to Moses prophetically during the golden calf incident anticipates what Spinoza will argue theologically in the *Treatise*'s next Chapter. By telling Moses that as a result of the Israelites' sin he would delegate an angel to take care of them rather than doing so directly, God removed any basis for claiming that the Israelites were more favored by God than other nations, who, Spinoza says, were also put in the care of angels.[46] Nevertheless in his revealed Law, as we shall see, Moses did not abandon the claim to most-favored nation status for the Israelites. The reason, so far as Spinoza lets us glimpse it here, had to do with their incapacity, as

[45] From Ch. 2's "geometrical" premises (2.1.1-5.8), its empirical argument goes on to demonstrate variations among prophets with respect to each's bodily temperament (2.6.1-5), eloquence or imaginative power (2.6 6-7 11) and prior opinions or prejudices (2.7.12-9.34), so as to establish the conclusion that prophetic revelations were simply accommodated to the prophets' pathology and did not presume or provide any scientific sophistication (2.10.1-10). The discussion of Moses (2.9.8-26), which occurs at or near the center of a list of prophets and others (Solomon and Paul) whose various prejudices are exposed as unscientific, is Ch. 2's most extensive.

[46] See also 3.5.37-43 on Ex. 33:16, discussed in connection with our third "aphorism," below.

"human beings accustomed to the superstitions of the Egyptians, crude, and done in by a most miserable slavery" (2.9.23), to arrive at any sound understanding of God. Moses could only teach them a "mode of living." Being unable to do so by appealing to their reason, which they were unused to exercising freely, he had to compel them by laws. At the same time, he needed to motivate them to obey the laws by encouraging them to be grateful to God for freeing them from Egyptian slavery, by terrifying them with punishments for disobedience, and by promising them rewards for obedience. In short, Moses was forced to treat the Israelites like children "who lack all reason" (2.9.25; cf. 16.6.13-14). Spinoza concludes from these circumstances that it is "certain" that the Israelites did not know "virtue and true blessedness" (2.9.26).

The certainty of Spinoza's conclusion here depends on his maintaining the distinction reiterated at the outset of Chapter 2, between understanding and imagination. This distinction, the result of his distinguishing between first- and second-hand certainty in Chapter 1, we may therefore characterize as step two of Spinoza's removing himself from the piety of his contemporaries. Even so, in his remarks on the golden calf incident, he leaves afterthoughts about how far that distinction lets us understand Moses' lawgiving activity, which owed something to Moses' understanding as well as to his imagination (cf. 1.13.1-2). These afterthoughts are taken up in Chapter 3.

**Step 3: Jews' Chosenness as Political Survival**

> Therefore, when Scripture says, to exhort the Hebrews to obedience to law, that God has chosen them for himself in preference to the other nations (see Dt. 10:15), that he is close to them and not so close to others (Dt. 4:4, 7), that he has prescribed just laws only for them (4:8), and, finally, that he has become known to them alone, to the neglect of the others (see 4:32), etc., it is only speaking to suit the grasp of those who—as we have shown in an earlier Chapter and as Moses attests as well (see Dt. 9:6-7)—did not know true blessedness. For surely they would not have been less blessèd if God had called everyone to salvation equally. And God would have been no less propitious to them even though he had been equally propitious to the others, nor the laws less just, or they themselves less wise, even if they had been prescribed to everyone; nor would miracles have shown God's power less if they had been made for the other nations as well. Nor, finally, would the Hebrews be less bound to worship God if God had bestowed all these gifts equally on everyone. [3.1.4]

Chapter 3 shifts the reader's perspective on Moses' lawgiving from its theological features to its political effects. The full extent of these effects is disguised by the theological language of the Bible itself. According to our third "aphorism," all theological statements suggesting that God shows a preference for the Israelites—by choosing them for himself, by being closer to them than to other nations, by prescribing just laws only for them, and by neglecting other nations so as to favor them alone—must be offset by the fact that Scripture only speaks to suit the Israelites' grasp. That their

grasp was inadequate for understanding the true meaning of these blessings follows from what Spinoza has already shown in Chapter 2 and what Moses is now said to attest to as well, namely, the Israelites' ignorance of true blessedness on account of their lingering slave-mentality. Spinoza adds that the Israelites would have been no less blessèd if God had promised to spread the same blessings equally among all nations. By going on to show that the Bible's statements about the exclusiveness of the Israelites' chosenness are no more than politically useful exaggerations, Spinoza indicates the need for new, more precise terms for ascertaining the true character of Israel's chosenness. The stipulations and definitions which open Chapter 3 are geared to supplying that need (3.1.1-5.1). The remainder of Spinoza's discussion is a rereading of the Bible's rhetorical excesses in the light of its political effectiveness in employing those excesses (3.5.2-69).

To see what is involved in Spinoza's rereading, let us look at his interpretation of Exodus 33:16 (3.5.37-43), to which he has already called attention in Chapter 2:

> *For by what reality will it be recognized that I and your populace have discovered grace in your eyes? Certainly when you go with us, and we shall be separated, I and your populace, from every populace that is on the surface of the earth.* [3.5.38]

The Pharisees, Spinoza says polemically, cite this statement as their main prooftext for the mistaken conviction that prophecy is exclusive to Israel. They interpret it to mean that Moses was asking God to be present to the Israelites and reveal himself prophetically to them alone. Spinoza ridicules their interpretation for implying that Moses was envying God's presence to the other nations. According to Spinoza, Moses' repeated request at Exodus 34:9 indicates instead that he was worried only about the Israelites' stubbornness, which would prevent the completing of measures already undertaken for their self-preservation. God's reply at 34:10, promising to make unprecedented miracles on the Israelites' behalf, is said to confirm that the sole purpose of the miracles was to overcome that stubbornness by establishing that their self-preservation efforts had divine support. The issue between the Pharisees and Spinoza, then, is whether Moses wanted to be certain of God's ongoing presence in accord with the Pharisees' view that the Israelites were the sole repository of God-given laws and of knowledge of God, or whether he only wanted to be certain that God would provide miracles and the like as necessary for the Israelites' ongoing self-preservation.

Spinoza's disagreement with the Pharisees here is not merely exegetical. Consider his somewhat unliteral rendering of **הלא** (*ha-lo*), the first Hebrew word of Exodus 33:16b, as *Certainly*. The Hebrew word normally introduces a question:

> *... Is it not* [הלא] *when you go with us and we shall be separated, I and your populace, from every populace that is on the surface of the earth?*

Why, we may ask, does Spinoza suppress the grammatical and rhetorical fact that the

second half of the verse is, like the first half, a question?[47] Before answering, let us look at the term "certainty" and its cognates as they have occurred thus far in the *Treatise*, that is to say, till almost two-thirds through Chapter 3, where the translation I have quoted is found. There are some forty prior instances. We have already seen the expressions "certain counsel" in the Preface's opening sentence and "certain knowledge" in Chapter 1's opening definitions of prophecy and prophets (2.1.1-2). What is striking about these instances and others is the difficulty of establishing their precise meaning at first reading. It is hard to tell offhand whether the term is meant in a strict sense ("sure-fire"? "iron-clad"? "crystal-clear"? "reliable"?) or in a more casual sense ("some"? "sort of"? "putative"? "given"?). Occasionally we do find instances that seem to carry only the more casual meaning, as when Spinoza denies that God's revealed word consists in "a certain number of books" (P.5.10), or when he glosses Deuteronomy 10:14-15 to the effect that God "chose the Hebrew nation and a certain area of land for himself" (2.9.12). Nevertheless other instances force us to think twice about whether Spinoza's meaning in the aforementioned instances, and *a fortiori* in the rest, is simply casual. In one set of later instances, Spinoza includes among the "certain means" for security and self-preservation "forming a society with certain laws" and "occupying a certain area of the world" (3.4.5): the combined references to laws and territory, etc., indicate a not-so-casual concern with political security and territorial boundaries. And in another later instance, in connection with philological matters (i.e., with establishing Spinoza's alternative to the aforementioned view that revelation consists of "a certain number of books"), he says that it is " certain" (i.e., confirmed or corroborated) that Balaam is a prophet equal in rank to the Israelite prophets inasmuch as the biblical Joshua speaks of him as a diviner or augur (3.5.36). From all these various instances, we are led to suppose either that Spinoza uses the term in question rather carelessly—despite the preponderance of evidence in the *Treatise* that he is not a careless writer—or else that the foregoing ambiguities are intended. Let us look again at Spinoza's rendering of Exodus 33:16 in light of the latter possibility.

In the original Hebrew, verse 16 contains two questions, which we may paraphrase as "How might Moses and the Israelites know that they have found divine grace?" and "Is it not by God's both staying with them and separating them from all other peoples?" Possibly the biblical writer means that the second question, once its interrogative character is removed, constitutes a certain or reliable answer to the first question. But then again, just because the Hebrew has the second question as a question, he may instead mean that, considered as an answer, it remains somewhat questionable. Consider that, even if the substance of the second question were true as far as it goes, might not divine grace still require more than God's otherwise unspecified presence to the Israelites as a separate people; at a minimum, might not God's presence and the Israelites' separateness be a shorthand formulation for what is required—which would include the Israelites' wholehearted obedience and persistent

[47] Spinoza suppresses the interrogative meaning of הלא on three other occasions in the *Treatise*. At 12.2.11, as in the present instance, his translation of Jer. 8:8 renders the term as "certainly." At 13.1.27, his translation of Jer. 22:15-16, which contains two instances of the term, seemingly overlooks them both.

loyalty to the manifold details of the Law? Downsizing Exodus 33:16's second question into a simple declaration, as Spinoza does, suppresses the possibility of biblical understatement. What then does Spinoza mean by putting the word "Certainly" in Moses' mouth? If the resulting meaning is only casual, then it seems to certify that, as a matter of course, God's presence, however understood, and the Israelites' separateness from other peoples are necessary and sufficient conditions for divine grace. Yet given that Moses' certainty has been superimposed in the first place and so shares in the ambiguity indicated by other instances of that term, Spinoza may be deliberately giving his biblically literate reader pause to consider whether it has a stricter meaning as well—and if so, how that meaning would fit the present context.

That Spinoza himself is not entirely oblivious to this last consideration is evident from the gloss he attaches to his translation:

> ...after Moses noted that the mental cast and spirit of his nation were stubborn, he clearly saw that, without very great miracles and God's special external help, they could not complete the matters that had been begun. Indeed, they would necessarily have perished without such help. And so he sought this special external help of God, so as to establish that God wanted them to be preserved. [3.5.40]

Accordingly, Moses' second question—construed in the strict sense as the clear and certain answer to his first question—becomes a way to "establish" on his own an effective antidote to his people's persistent worries that they might not survive en route through the desert to their ancestral homeland, by promising them instead God's "special external help" and miracles, i.e., as Spinoza has explained these terms earlier in Chapter 3, natural occurrences whose causes lay outside the Israelites' purview and which would work in favor of their ongoing self-preservation (cf. 3.3.4-5, 4.6). In Spinoza's rendering, then, Moses' announced certainty, strictly understood, comes down to his reliance on the effectiveness of his own rhetoric—or, to speak crudely in today's language, successful spin—for persuading the Israelites in so many words that environmental conditions were favorable for them to sustain themselves throughout their desert wanderings and beyond. Once again, it seems, the flow of Spinoza's argument has all but eroded the distinctively theological element of the biblical text, this time by draining it into Moses' political rhetoric.

As in the two previous Chapters, Spinoza builds toward this conclusion by supplying its premises in Chapter 3's introductory apparatus (3.1.1-5.1). Chapter 3 as a whole aims at two overall conclusions, both of which inform his exegesis of Exodus 33:16: that the "calling" or chosenness of the Jews is coeval with their political independence (3.2.1-5.19, 51-69) and that prophecy per se is not particularly Jewish (3.5.20-50). The introductory apparatus includes five definitions, or redefinitions, of theological terms (3.3.1-7) and a threefold division of human psychological motives (3.4.1-6). Together, the five definitions and the threefold psychology structure the Chapter's biblical evidence—including Exodus 33:16—in support of the Chapter's twin conclusions.

The five definitions make theological matters interchangeable with laws of nature, seen as God's decrees. The laws of nature themselves, which are said to order and determine everything, are called "God's direction." When those laws produce environmental conditions that foster human survival, they are "God's external help"; when those same laws move humans to make survival efforts on their own, they are "God's internal help." If the resulting efforts are successful, the laws of nature cooperating in that success are "God's choosing." Finally, when the laws of nature cooperate unexpectedly in survival efforts whether these are successful or not, the same laws of nature are "fortune." Notably absent from this list of definitions is the term "miracle," despite its imminent role in Spinoza's discussion of Exodus 33:16. Spinoza waits until discussing humans' threefold motivational psychology before giving something approximating a definition, which if spelled out would prove perfectly compatible with the five theological definitions just given. Miracles, we soon gather, are unexpected natural events successfully preserving human beings whose preservation has been in great danger (3.4.6). In other words, miracles are simply great and unexpected good fortune when one's future seemed hopeless. Spinoza puts off a full-fledged discussion of miracles till Chapter 6. Chapter 3's definitions have the more limited purpose of making possible the discovery of the "proximate and efficient causes" by which to pinpoint "what it was on account of which the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God in preference to the rest" (3.3.8, with 3.4.2). These causes point in turn to the effectiveness of Moses' political rhetoric, in the manner we have already seen.

Spinoza's threefold motivational psychology meanwhile leads to the conclusion that chosenness in general is no more than a theological way of describing how fortune cooperates in what human beings successfully choose for themselves. Human longings, the ultimate goals of human choice, boil down to three: knowledge, virtue, and self-preservation (3.4.1). The first two, knowledge and virtue, remain wholly within the power of each of us. The third, self-preservation, depends in part on causes outside our power. Yet here too our own efforts can help considerably. Some means for preserving ourselves are more certain of success than others. The most certain means include forming a society with "certain" laws, occupying a "certain" area of the world, and merging our own efforts with those of other individuals so as to form a unified society (3.4.3). Certainty of success here is proportional to the effectiveness of "human direction," i.e., methodical or orderly decision-making, as well as vigilance (3.4.5). To the extent that these factors are present, they displace our need to rely on fortune, though admittedly they are never fully present. Still, human beings do succeed in forming stable societies, at least for a while, despite imperfect human direction and vigilance. Such success characterized the Israelites as well. They were "chosen" not in respect of their knowledge or their virtue (inasmuch as these characterize individuals only) but "by reason of their society, and fortune, by which they acquired an imperium and kept that same one for so many years" (3.5.1). The Israelites' chosenness thus consisted in their political longevity, the result of a successful combination of God's internal help, in the form of the laws of Moses, and God's external help or good fortune, including of course "miracles." Since comparable combinations of

God's internal and external help were also achieved by other nations for as long as their societies lasted, however, chosenness as such is not particularly Jewish, any more than prophecy is.

Chapter 3 concludes with Spinoza's answering the counterclaim of the Pharisees, who cite biblical statements (e.g., Jer. 31:36, Ezek. 20:32) to show that God's choosing the Jews was forever and not necessarily tied to their political autonomy (3.5.51-69). In reply, Spinoza cites other biblical statements to show that immorality would destroy the Israelites just as it did the Canaanites and others (Lev. 18:27-28, Dt. 8:19-20), that only the pious or truly virtuous would survive such destruction (Ezek. 20:38, Zeph. 3:12-13), and that these same conditions presumably hold for all nations (Zeph. 3:10-11). He adds that prophetic statements about reinstituting the ancient sacrifices and other ceremonies, along with rebuilding the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, were only rhetorical references to the temporal (and of course temporary) restoration of their imperium[48] and Temple worship under Cyrus. Jews' survival since biblical times without an imperium of their own is to be explained instead not by the eternity of their covenant with God but by other nations' ongoing hatred of them as a result of their deliberately separating themselves by maintaining distinctive religious ceremonies. That the Jews' self-imposed separateness is the cause of the hatred, Spinoza shows empirically by the difference between the recent Spanish and Portugese policies concerning Marranos (forced converts). Whereas in Spain all who converted rather than emigrate were immediately accorded the full political privileges of Christians, in Portugal the converts afterward kept to themselves and so were not accorded those privileges. At the same time, that Jews' separateness is self-imposed suggests to Spinoza that their slide to sub-political status could some day be reversed by their own efforts, given the changeableness of human affairs, so long as the distinctive practices to which they meanwhile cling did not soften their political will:

> ... indeed, I would absolutely believe that, unless the foundations of their religion were to make their spirits effeminate, they will someday, given the occasion—as human affairs are changeable—erect their imperium once more, and God will choose them anew. [3.5.67]

Spinoza's suggestion anticipates the program of modern political Zionism, which starts from his premise that Jews' well-being rests at bottom on strictly political initiatives rather than on divine ones.

Reducing chosenness to political longevity, and prophecy or revelation to rhetoric in service to that longevity, constitutes Spinoza's third step away from Jewish (and Christian) orthodoxy. Not quite fully articulated in that step, however, is his recourse to laws of nature, by whatever name, as the framework for understanding biblical matters and redefining theological terms. Moses' political rhetoric at Exodus 33:16 as Spinoza presents it, for example, would be inconceivable without imputing to him an implicit supposition that there are purely natural factors—nature's law-abiding regularities—permitting the Israelites to preserve themselves during their desert

[48] For the *Treatise*'s own understanding of this term, see Ch. 16 and our comments on it, below.

wanderings and beyond. In Chapter 4, Spinoza faces the resulting question of how, despite its unscientific way of presenting things, the Bible may be said to be aware of laws of nature.

### Step 4: Traditional vs. Natural Divine Law

> ...since the noun "law" seems applied to natural things by transference, and commonly nothing else is understood by law than a command that human beings can either fulfill or neglect—inasmuch as a law confines human power within certain boundaries beyond which that power extends, and does not command anything above the strength of that power—therefore it seems that Law is to be defined more particularly: namely, it is a plan of living which a human being prescribes for himself or others in view of some end. [4.2.1]

A quick overview of Chapter 4 is as follows. Spinoza begins with two separate definitions of "law," corresponding to the difference between scientific and political law (4.1.1-2.2). He goes on to treat an analogous ambiguity in the term "divine law" (4.2.3-4.11). Eventually he arrives at two theologically unorthodox conclusions. First, God does not prescribe laws as a human lawgiver, i.e., purposively (4.4.14-31). Second, the Bible in its own way endorses philosophy or science (4.4.32-50).

Spinoza's argument in Chapter 4, as elsewhere, is studded with theological and other ambiguities. It differs from other Chapters in calling attention to those ambiguities explicitly rather than implicitly, by providing two separate definitions of law at its outset. On the one hand, law is that according to which individuals act "by one and the same certain and determinate plan" (4.1.1). Laws, so defined, are behavioral regularities expressed by a formula. Such laws fit, indifferently, inert bodies (as in the law stipulating the constant quantity of their motion during collisions), human minds (as in the psychological law of association) and political communities (including even the apparently free decision by human beings to submit to lawgivers in the first place, presumably since the fact that humans regularly make such decisions is enough to warrant our calling their doing so a law) (4.1.2-8). On the other hand, as our fourth "aphorism" says, from the viewpoint of political life itself the term "seems applied to natural things by transference" (4.2.1). Law in this second or political sense is synonymous with the purposive commands of lawgivers. More exactly, it is "a plan of living which human beings prescribe to themselves or others in view of some end" (4.2.1, 3). Evidently political laws are prior in time to scientific laws. Spinoza implies that philosophers or scientists arrive at scientific laws by supposing that nature is like a perfectly ordered political community, except that its ordering principles are not identical with commands strictly speaking, since these may not always be followed, but instead with the mechanical regularities found jointly in the spontaneous generating of commands by lawgivers and the unhesitant obeying of them by subjects—and by extension and analogy in an exhaustive web of regularities pervading intra-human and extra-human behavior as well. Yet while spelling out and schematizing in the macrocosm of nature the putative orderliness first found writ small within the microcosm

of political life, scientific laws lose something in translation. They shed their subservience to the purposiveness with which political laws as such are earmarked by their original lawgiver.

Even so, the shift from political to scientific laws seems less smooth or more abrupt than Spinoza's all-too-brief account suggests. If Spinoza is correct about the genesis of scientific laws, we may ask, does the scientist's stripping them of purposiveness and reducing them to mechanical regularities follow from the brute exigencies of nature itself, or rather from the deliberate narrowing of focus required for looking in minute detail to see how far such regularities might extend beyond the horizon of political life? At issue here is whether all laws when fully or cosmologically understood are in the end like political laws in exhibiting some purpose conceived by a lawgiver beforehand (as the biblical account, for one, suggests) or whether all laws are like the laws of inert bodies, behavioral uniformities apart from any predetermined purpose (as Spinoza here maintains) or, finally, whether this question remains humanly unresolvable. A sign that the question is not quite resolved in Chapter 4, at least, is that his two accounts of law do not quite mesh. Among other things, why it is still necessary to call scientific laws "laws" in the absence of a purposive lawgiver is never exactly explained. Spinoza does not let this unsettling perplexity rise fully to the surface of the Chapter, however. He blurs it rhetorically and acknowledges it only indirectly. In this regard, we are once again reminded that the *Treatise* is less a quasi-geometrical system than a theologico-political project. Offsetting its biblically sophisticated reader's naive inclination to associate laws exclusively with purposive lawgivers, and redirecting him to look as far as possible for impersonal certainties, is another way of describing both the *Treatise*'s stated intention and its self-imposed limitation.

Correspondingly, the ambiguity of "divine law" also receives short shrift (4.2.4, 3.6-7, 4.10). From a traditional point of view, the divine law is identical with the law of Moses (4.4.5). From a scientific point of view, however, it is said to be the plan of living that our own mind, to the extent that we can conceive the idea of God clearly and distinctly, prescribes to us for the purpose of coming to know and benefit from the all-pervasive laws of nature, understood as God's decrees. In other words, it is the self-prescribed way of life of human beings whose freely chosen priority is philosophy or science rather than religious piety. Spinoza calls the divine law in this second sense the "natural divine law." The natural divine law thus differs from the traditional divine law in four respects: its way of life is open to all human beings; it does not require believing in any "histories" (or "stories"); it does not require performing any ceremonies; and following it is its own reward, inasmuch as knowing God, or (what is the same thing here) loving him freely and fully and steadfastly as the intelligible source of everything else, is inherently satisfying. Spinoza's confining his brief remarks about the natural divine law to the introductory apparatus of Chapter 4 suggests that he is less concerned with expounding it in full than with invoking it as a premise for answering four interrelated questions: Does God prescribe laws as a human lawgiver does (i.e., purposively)? What does the Bible teach about the natural divine law? Why does the Bible institute ceremonies? What is the point of the biblical

histories (or stories)? Spinoza devotes the remainder of Chapter 4 to answering the first two questions, and Chapter 5 to answering the last two.

To his first question, about God as lawgiver, Spinoza answers that God prescribes laws but not purposively. His answer consists of a deductive argument based on the strict identification of God's understanding with God's will, from which it follows that God does not deliberate but simply decrees laws of nature impersonally or, as we might say, automatically (4.4.14-17). This answer is then corroborated by interpreting several biblical statements that appear to be saying the opposite (4.4.18-31). To his second question, about the natural divine law, Spinoza answers that the Bible commends it. This answer consists mainly of citing and interpreting several pertinent biblical statements. We limit ourselves here to showing the remarkable freedom Spinoza takes in interpreting those statements, by looking in particular at his citations from Proverbs, his central source for corroborating his second answer.

Here is Spinoza's interpolated gloss on Solomon's words at Proverbs 3:13, 16-17:

> ...*Blessèd is the human being who has found science* [חכמה], *and the son of a human being who has extracted understanding* [תבונה]. The reason is—as vss. 16-17 go on to say—that *It gives length of days directly, riches and honor indirectly. Its ways*—which, no doubt, science indicates—*are charming, and all its paths are peace.* [4.4.38b]

Spinoza glosses these verses as testimony to the benefits of science, which is said to enable human beings to acquire, among other things, not only understanding but also tranquility of spirit (cf. 4.4.38a). His gloss owes much to what we may call his freedom of philosophizing as translator. His rendering into Latin of חכמה (*chokhmah*), ordinarily "wisdom," as "science," is a bit startling, though not entirely unanticipated. In Chapter 1, Spinoza has already translated *chokhmah* in Deuteronomy 4:6 as "science" (1.20.15) and, alluding to I Kings 5:9-14, has referred to Solomon's *chokhmah* as "natural science" (1.18.6). In neither instance has he quoted the Hebrew, however. In the present instance, he surrounds his gloss on Proverbs 3:13, 16-17 with renderings of 16:22 and 13:14 on the one hand and 2:3, 5, 9-10 on the other (see 4.4.36-37, 40, 43). Each of these verses contains either or both of the aforementioned terms, and/or some other term or terms akin in subject-matter, all of which Spinoza translates rather promiscuously. For instance, whereas in 13:13 and again in 2:10 "science" is *chokhmah*, in 2:5 it is meanwhile (and more literally) דעת (*da'at*), the usual Hebrew word for "knowledge." In 2:10, however, *da'at* is "wisdom," the literal translation of *chokhmah*; and a third term, תבונה (*tevunah*), which the biblical author sets in parallel with *chokhmah* and *da'at*, becomes "prudence." In 2:5, *tevunah* is also "prudence," albeit just after it has shown up in both 3:13 and 2:3 as "understanding." Finally, in 16:22 the adjective חכם (*chakham*), literally "wise," makes a single prior appearance as "prudent." Evidently Spinoza goes out of his way to mix the meanings of these several terms. If there is any warrant for his doing so, it would seem connected with his characterization of Solomon, the putative author of Proverbs. When first introducing the foregoing list of citations, Spinoza calls attention to the Bible's commending

Solomon's "prudence and wisdom" rather than his "prophecy and piety," and comments on Solomon's popularity as author by saying that the Israelites embraced his "tenets" (or "sentences") as religiously as they did the prophets' (4.4.34).

Spinoza's prior treatment of Solomon in the *Treatise* requires some sorting out. Having conflated Solomon's wisdom in Chapter 1 with natural science (1.18.6), Spinoza goes on in Chapter 2 to sever it from prophecy altogether (2.1.2). He soon finds occasion to deny that Solomon was a mathematician, however, since according to I Kings 7:23 he thought of the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle naively as three-to-one (2.8.9-11). Subsequently Spinoza observes that, although or because Solomon surpassed all his contemporaries in reason, he considered himself above the Law, indulged in pleasures in a manner inappropriate for a philosopher, and taught that all goods of fortune were vain but that human beings' greatest good was understanding and their greatest punishment foolishness (2.9.28). In Chapter 3, Spinoza argues that God's saying to Solomon that no one in the future would be wiser was "only a mode of speaking for signifying extreme wisdom," not an indication that God would never bestow such wisdom on anyone else (3.1.5). Finally, earlier in Chapter 4 Spinoza endorses a statement of Solomon's in support of the common definition of justice as "the steadfast and perpetual will to give each his right" (4.2.2). Viewing all these remarks as background for Spinoza's free renderings of Solomon's "tenets," we arrive at the following. Admittedly, Solomon's words—spliced and edited and air-brushed so as to highlight and blur the various terms for "science," "wisdom," etc.—give the appearance of saying more or less the same as Spinoza himself in the *Treatise*. The difference remains, however, that Spinoza's Solomon is no mathematician and, liberated as he is from the common opinions of those around him, does not see much need for his own private self-discipline in moral matters. By Spinoza's standards, then, Solomon could not have been a philosopher except honorifically.[49] Insufficiently mathematical, he lacked the scientific sophistication for understanding the laws of nature to which the *Treatise* ultimately appeals; insufficiently self-disciplined, he lacked political prudence as well. Spinoza's subsequent references to Solomon in the *Treatise* go so far as to suggest cumulatively that, as or although Israel's first hereditary king, he might have delayed the Israelites' political decline for at least a generation, but for the aforementioned shortcomings (cf. 11.1.16, 12.2.8, 18.3.5, 19.2.15, 3.14, with 17.12.52).

Despite the apparent dubbing of his words for Spinoza's and vice versa, then, Solomon plays only a cameo role in the *Treatise*. His "sentences," freely adapted under the rubric of the natural divine law, give a quasi-biblical imprimatur to the *Treatise*'s ongoing critique of and corrective for prophecy. As an intra-biblical alternative to the traditional divine law, they serve to certify in a simplified manner—as mere tenets—Spinoza's more elaborate argument. At the same time, they illustrate what we may call Spinoza's fourth step away from religious orthodoxy, his looking to mirror the difference between the traditional and the natural divine law, i.e., between piety and philosophy or science, in the biblical tenets themselves.

[49] Even so, at 6.1.94 Spinoza refers to Solomon as "the Philosopher"

**Step 5: Piety as Executing God's Will**

> Since, however, the ceremonies—those that are found in the Old Testament, at least—were only instituted for the Hebrews, and moreover were so accommodated to their imperium that for the most part they could not be performed by anyone away from the entire society, it is certain that they do not pertain to the divine law; and so they do not do anything for blessedness and virtue either. But they have to do solely with the choosing of the Hebrews, that is (by what we have shown in Ch. 3), solely with the temporal happiness of the body and the tranquility of the imperium; and on that account, they could only be of any use while their imperium was standing. [5.1.2]

Chapter 5 answers Spinoza's two questions left over from Chapter 4, before reaching a further conclusion (5.1.1-3.11, 3.12-4.18, 4.19-24). His first leftover question, concerning the point of the biblical ceremonies, requires a four-part answer: A brief introduction reiterates the distinction between the traditional and the natural divine law, except that Spinoza drops the term "natural" so that the latter is now referred to simply as the divine law (or the "universal" divine law) and the former simply as ceremonies (5.1.1-3). Next, biblical statements are cited to show that not ceremonies per se but only the universal divine law leads to blessedness (5.1.4-25). Third, a deductive argument demonstrates the need for political society in general (5.2.1-15). Finally, this last argument is extended to the need for ceremonies in the Israelites' political society in particular (5.3.1-11). Spinoza's second leftover question, concerning the point of the biblical histories, receives a simpler answer: A deductive argument demonstrates that histories (or stories) are only needed for persuading human beings who cannot follow rational arguments (5.3.12-4.18). Having answered both leftover questions in a manner consistent with Chapter 4's treatment of the natural divine law, Spinoza concludes Chapter 5 by rejecting outright the orthodox Jewish view as formulated by Maimonides that blessedness or salvation requires obeying the biblical precepts because they are prophetically revealed rather than because they are in accord with reason (5.4.19-24). Our fifth "aphorism" constitutes the bulk of Spinoza's brief introduction to his first answer, though it bears on his second answer and his conclusion as well.

In itself, this "aphorism" argues that the Bible's religious ceremonies were not part of the (universal) divine law since the latter applies to all human beings whereas the ceremonies were intended only for the Israelites. The ceremonies served the larger purposes of their political society—collective prosperity and peace, rather than individual blessedness and virtue. The moment that society became defunct, its ceremonies became outmoded and useless. Their merit, in other words, stood or fell with God's "choosing" of the Israelites.

As usual, the logical cogency of Spinoza's argument depends on his radical redefinitions of theological terms—"divine law," "choosing," etc. Its theological plausibility, however, depends no less on his gathering support from the biblical text. We have already seen how Spinoza's reducing the biblical text to its constituent

"sentences" allows him—as translator, for example—to tailor them to his theological argument. In the present instance, we see how he translates to suit his upcoming political argument as well.

Consider his rendering of Psalm 40:7, 9, the first of three biblical citations that Spinoza quotes in the original Hebrew before translating to show that only the universal divine law and not particular religious ceremonies leads to blessedness:

> *Sacrifice and tribute you have not wanted; ears you have hollowed out for me; holocaust and sin offering you have not sought. Your will, my God, I have wanted to execute* [לעשות]. *For your law* [ותורתך] *is in my entrails.* [5.1.7]

Spinoza's apparent gratuitouness in rendering **לעשות** (*la'asot*) as "to execute" draws our attention. Unlike "to do" or "to make," the presumptive translations of the Hebrew infinitive, "executing" implies single-mindedly "following out" something. It introduces overriding considerations of efficiency. Spinoza thus renders the Psalmist's words as stating a quid pro quo. By virtue of excluding the ceremonies prescribed to the Israelites in particular,[50] doing God's will is now said to mean "following out" the universal divine law inscribed in the minds of all human beings so as to achieve in return the blessing of spiritual tranquility. Spinoza effectively rules out any likelihood that the Psalmist is moved to obey the divine law (the Hebrew reads "Torah") first and foremost by pious devotion, if not by attraction to the Torah's inherent wisdom as well (cf. Dt. 4:6-8). Spinoza's Psalmist obeys the law for its strictly extrinsic results. To see what Spinoza may be getting at here, let us look at the other instances of "executing" in the *Treatise*.

Earlier we find the term twice. Spinoza employs it first as a noun when stating that "God uses the pious as the instruments of his piety and the impious as the executors and means of his anger" (2.4.1). This usage is tightly framed by references to Abigail's scheme for circumventing her ungrateful husband Nabal to supply food for David and his guerilla warriors (I Sam. 25) and Micaiah's scheme for foiling the false prophets who deceive King Ahab (I Ki. 22).[51] On closer inspection, what is striking about Spinoza's usage is that although the expression "executors and means" in the second clause appears synonymous with "instruments" in the first clause, nevertheless it refers only to the "impious" (e.g., Nabal and Ahab), not to the "pious" (e.g., Abigail and Micaiah). Spinoza insulates "executors ..." from any direct contact with the pious. Shortly afterwards, the term in question shows up in verbal form when

[50] Immediately prior to quoting Ps. 40:7, 9, Spinoza cites Is. 1:10 to the effect that sacrifices and festivals are excluded from the divine law, so that spiritual self-purification and good deeds and helping the poor are by themselves necessary and sufficient conditions for human blessedness (5.1.6; cf. 12.2 22). Spinoza disregards Maimonides' interpretation of Is. 1:11 to the effect that the divine law does not command sacrifices for their own sake, but only as a means for redirecting and eliminating idolatrous habits (*Guide of the Perplexed* III.32 [trans. Pines, 525-31]) Maimonides' Isaiah demotes sacrifices to a lower rank; Spinoza's issues a dishonorable discharge.

[51] These allusions are introduced by Spinoza's appeal to the "old proverb" mentioned in I Sam. 24:14, although he neither quotes nor paraphrases the proverb itself. The biblical verse reads, *As the ancient proverb says, "From the wicked comes forth wickedness, but my hand shall not be on you."*

Abraham is said to pray that God not execute the sentence against Sodom until he knew whether all Sodomites were deserving of that punishment (2.9.6; see Gen. 18:17-32). When it next appears, in Spinoza's translation of Psalm 40:7, 9, it might seem at first glance to apply purely and simply to the pious.[52] Yet its usurping the place of an innocent alternative like "to do" provokes some second thoughts. Why, we wonder, does Spinoza render the putatively pious words of the Psalmist by a term that, to judge by its two previous uses, does not sort with routine law-abidingness?

Of the eighteen subsequent instances of the term in the *Treatise* itself,[53] the first six occur in our present Chapter. The remaining instances except for two are evenly split between Chapters 16 and 17, which treat, respectively, the democratic basis of all political society, and the historical origin and demise of the biblical theocracy with a view to its democratic lessons nowadays. The present Chapter, then, contains the largest concentration of instances to be found in any single Chapter of the *Treatise*. If, however, Chapters 16 and 17 are combined as regards their common political subject-matter, then whereas Chapter 5 contains the most instances of the term in its predominantly theological use, Chapters 16-17 contain the most instances in its predominantly political use. The term thus participates in the *Treatise*'s gradual transition from biblical theology to liberal-democratic politics, to which it contributes considerably. Its contribution owes much to the theological respectability bestowed on it by its newfound biblical setting.

Consider that, of the six remaining theological instances of the term in Chapter 5, the first three refer to "executing commands" imposed by a single authority (God or Moses, though in principle any authority) (5.2.14, 15, 3.8); the last three are renderings of the Hebrew verb as found in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* concerning the conditions under which non-Jews who have executed the seven precepts revealed to the biblical Noah may be called pious under the traditional divine law (5.4.*19* [twice], 20). Of the ten political instances in Chapters 16-17, the first concerns an individual's "power of executing whatever he wants" (16.5.17); the next six concern executing the commands of political authorities (16.6.4 [twice], 9, 7.15; 17.1.2, 6); the eighth is Spinoza's rendering of the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 18:16, which is added to a pastiche of Deuteronomy 5:21-24 and 18:15 in order to show how the Israelites renegotiated their earlier covenant promising to obey God directly, in favor of a new covenant promising to execute whatever Moses said as God's spokesman (17.5.2); finally, the ninth and tenth instances concern the difference between Moses' consequent right to compel the people to execute God's wishes on his own and his subsequently dividing that right among his successors via an administrative system of checks and balances (17.5.4, 20). The two intervening instances, in Chapter 14, refer to the biblical teaching of charity as "what anyone has to execute so as to gratify God," and, subsequently, to "what is absolutely necessary for executing this command" (14.1.13-14). With each use, the term's original meaning appears to undergo successive expansions to

[52] Ps 40:8, the intervening verse that Spinoza omits without ellipsis from his translation, reads, *Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written about me."* It suggests, *contra* Spinoza, that the Psalmist may be thinking simply of the traditional divine law after all.

[53] Spinoza uses the term again in A.33 (in connection with 16 6 12), i.e., in one of the 39 marginal annotations subsequently appended to the *Treatise* (See the Translator's Remarks.)

suit its expanding role. From "following out" secret decisions, first among human beings and then between human beings and God, it soon includes "following out" God-given laws (Ps. 40:7, 9), then "following out" whatever pleases God, afterwards "following out" whatever pleases oneself, and finally "following out" collective decisions first among human beings themselves and later in conjunction with God concerning whatever laws please human beings and, concomitantly, God. Little by little, the term may be seen to extend to all of human religious and political behavior—secret and public, extra-legal and law-abiding, and of course impious and pious. Meanwhile, throughout its various uses it continues to mean acting with narrowly-focused efficency, i.e., succeeding at some task with no outside distraction or guidance beyond the original decision that the task be undertaken. By suggesting cumulatively that human beings' characteristic religious and political actions involve "executing" tasks entailed by some prior decision-making, Spinoza frees each "executor" as such from unwarranted on-site interference that might disrupt his concentrating on the task at hand. As we shall see further when we return to the seven dogmas Spinoza proposes for his liberal-democratic civil religion in Chapter 14, his gloss on Psalm 40:7, 9 looks ahead to a new religiosity consisting of "following out" tenets that, whatever their intrinsic theological merit, have the additional political merit of encouraging non-interference with the diverse religiosities of others, i.e., of promoting theological (and political) tolerance. All this is to say that, once retrofitted to the biblical text, the term in question is gradually broken in to serve the joint requirements of liberal religion and liberal politics in Spinoza's new dispensation.

If the *Treatise*'s new religiosity boils down to "following out" biblical tenets, then ceremonies themselves can have only instrumental value. These are to be attended to or ignored according as they are found consistent or inconsistent with the tenets to which they are believed to correspond. The same goes for the biblical histories (or stories) too. What is more important than either ceremonies or stories is that no one be prevented by others, whether human or divine, from acting consistently with the tenets he professes. Not even God is allowed to interfere with human autonomy here. To establish this last point, Spinoza once again has the biblical text do much of his work for him. If step five of his self-distancing from traditional piety is his construing it as executing, his next step can only be to show how God's not intervening in human actions is confirmed not only by strictly philosophical considerations but also by the Bible itself.

**Step 6: Clearing Away Miracles**

> The vulgar ... call unusual works of nature miracles, or works of God; and partly out of devotion, partly out of a longing to oppose those who cultivate the natural sciences, they long not to know the natural causes of things, and yearn to hear only what they are most ignorant of and what on that account they most admire. Viz., since they can only adore God, and refer everything to his imperium and will, for no other reason except by denying natural causes and imagining things outside the order of nature; and they

> do not admire God's power more than while imagining the power of nature as if it were being subdued by God. [6.1.3-4]

Chapter 6 completes the *Treatise*'s six-step lead-in to Spinoza's applying scientific method to reading the Bible (Ch. 7-11). It rounds out the theological preliminaries initiated in Chapter 1. Our sixth "aphorism" is thus a more sophisticated version of the first "aphorism" with which we began. Whereas our first "aphorism" simply warned not to be misled by the biblical writers' naïve manner of writing, the present "aphorism" finds Spinoza now in a position to discover the theological motive behind their naïveté.

He attributes to them a kind of pathetic fallacy. He starts Chapter 6 with the general observation that unscientific human beings who wonder about some unusual occurrence in nature which does not happen to fit with their customary opinions about nature are apt to attribute the cause of their wonderment to miracles, rather than to the limitations of their own opinions. They project rather than internalize the cause. Unfortunately, in doing so they pit God against nature, as if these were two different powers that could be at odds. God always wins, in their opinion, by subduing or suspending nature's power at will. Spinoza traces the habit of imagining an adversarial relationship between God and nature to the "first Jews." It began with the Bible's polemic against the idolatrous worship of "visible gods" (sun, moon, earth, water, air, etc.). In their unscientific way, the biblical writers imagined God as an invisible ruler who directs the whole of nature for the sake of their own people alone. Compared to the biblical God, the visible gods could easily be shown to be "weak and unsteadfast, or changeable" (6.1.5). Spinoza leaves the reader on his own to recall how the Bible's rhetoric in these matters subserved God's "choosing" of the Israelites, in the *Treatise*'s sense of the term (see Ch. 3).

Chapter 6 as a whole claims to be nothing more than a clarification of the belief in miracles as just summarized (6.1.1-6). It aims to "teach the matter in order" (6.1.7). It ascertains what the belief in miracles involves, as we might say, systematically. Accordingly, the rest of the Chapter makes four main points. First, nature always acts by its own, divinely decreed laws; therefore, so-called miracles are nothing but stunningly favorable events as described by those unable to discover their natural explanations, even though all miracles have natural explanations in principle (6.1.12-19). Second, miracles do not prove God's existence or essence or providence, which are better understood in terms of the laws of nature (6.1.20-46). Third, the Bible itself identifies God's decrees with the natural order resulting from laws of nature (6.1.47-67). Finally, biblical passages narrating miracles are to be accounted for in terms of the unscientific prejudices of the writers and the means of expression peculiar to biblical Hebrew (6.1.68-89).

Spinoza ends Chapter 6 by calling attention to the difference between his method of arguing about miracles here and his method of arguing about prophecy, etc., in earlier Chapters (6.1.90-102). Here his argument has been "plainly philosophical," i.e., from premises whose truth is knowable by reason quite apart from what the Bible says or does not say. Arguments about prophecy, on the other hand, are "merely

theological": since prophecy depends on principles outside human grasp, he had been limited to arguing about prophecy from principles supplied only by the biblical text. Remarkably, Spinoza now says that in the case of miracles he could have argued either way—philosophically or theologically—and still come to the same conclusions. For the first time in the *Treatise*, philosophy and theology appear to have reached common ground with no need for further rhetorical ambiguities of the sort generated so far by Spinoza's six-stage reworking of theological terms. Whether from a theological or a philosophical point of view, where the legitimacy of miracles is concerned, no means no. Now that theology can stop clinging to the belief in miracles as its basis, and philosophy can stop pretending to defer to that belief just to make its anti-theological arguments rhetorically persuasive, both can endorse the serious business of interpreting the Bible scientifically.

**Step 7: The Bible as Historical Document**

> ... just as the method of interpreting nature consists mainly in laying out a history of nature—from which, as from certain data, we conclude the definitions of natural things—so, too, it is necessary for interpreting Scripture to furnish its straightforward history and by legitimate inferences to conclude from it, as from certain data and principles, the mind of the authors of Scripture. For thus anyone (if, no doubt, he will admit that no other principles and data for interpreting Scripture and the things that are contained in it are to be discussed, except only those that are brought out by Scripture itself and its history) will always proceed without any danger of erring and will be able to discuss what exceeds our grasp just as securely as what we know by the natural light. [7.1.10]

Chapter 7 marks a new beginning. Spinoza starts by reiterating the need, first shown in the Preface, for applying scientific method to interpreting the Bible with a view to eliminating politically divisive theological controversies (7.1.1-24). He goes on to list the three components of the method he now proposes: recovering the grammatical properties of biblical Hebrew; gathering and classifying the biblical "tenets" (*sententiae*) according to subject matter; and compiling a case history of each book's authorship, process of composition and reception (7.2.1-3, 3.1-13, 4.1-7). Of the three components, the central one—organizing the biblical tenets—is also central in importance, as we have already seen. Spinoza treats its implementation in some detail, before treating the details of the other two components—recovering the grammar and compiling the case histories—as difficulties accompanying implementation of the central one (7.5.1-30, 5.31-9.3, 10.1-11.13). He concludes the Chapter by refuting three competing methods (7.11.14-50). Maimonides', which occupies the center of Spinoza's list of competitors, receives the most detailed refutation (7.11.21-39). As our seventh "aphorism" indicates, the model for Spinoza's method, and his standard for refuting the Maimonidean alternative, is the method of modern natural science.

For reasons that will become clear in a moment, we limit ourselves to indicating the connection between this "aphorism" and Spinoza's refutation of Maimonides.

According to our "aphorism," biblical criticism like natural science must start by assembling the Bible's "straightforward history" as the sole basis for interpreting the biblical text. By straightforward history, Spinoza means construing the raw data of the biblical text—the biblical tenets plus the narrative passages, which together exhaust the text—entirely in their own terms. He emphatically rules out any attempt to demonstrate the truth of the biblical tenets from theological or philosophical principles arrived at independently of the text. Such an attempt, he implies, would skew our efforts to understand the Bible as it understands itself. After all, as Spinoza has indicated in previous Chapters, there is little textual evidence to substantiate the claim that the tenets have been derived by reasoning from prior principles. Looking at the tenets as if they were derivative, then, would compromise the certainty we might otherwise have concerning the Bible if we considered the text *sui generis*. We must proceed instead by way of careful inferences from the biblical data pure and simple (tenets plus narratives), with only the grammar and the case histories for further guidance. In brief, Spinoza's method aims at no more than the plain intra-textual or literal meaning of the Bible. For, not to repeat the entire argument of Spinoza's Preface, what we can know for certain about the Bible, in contrast to what the various competing sectarian theologies claim, is the motive for Spinoza's proposed method in the first place.

The basic difficulty Spinoza is addressing here is the Bible's evident inability or unwillingness to spell out on its own and to all comers the means for settling the theological disputes its tenets and narratives have incited, if perhaps inadvertently. Spinoza therefore takes matters into his own hands. He works to secure the Bible's cooperation, forcibly as it were. He places the Bible under constraint before cross-examining it. In Spinoza's hands, the Bible is only allowed to answer questions about what it has to say by repeating verbatim its own previously recorded statements. For guarding against taking statements that are unrepresentative of its overall teaching as the Bible's last word, moreover, his method goes on to make all biblical statements on any given subject available at a glance for mutual comparison. Classifying and subclassifying the biblical statements according to subject matter would reorganize them for all practical purposes into a handy data bank or topically arranged concordance. Wild theological inferences from hastily conceived prooftexts could then be safely fenced in, by surrounding them with a sufficient number of counter-instances whose plain meaning is clear and which may be drawn with ease from the concordance. In this way, all philologically unwarranted and theologically outlandish prooftexting would be effectively discredited, and discouraged from the outset.

Spinoza's refutation of Maimonides is both the main test and the underlying purpose of his proposed method. Unlike the two other methods Spinoza refutes, only Maimonides' incorporates philosophy explicitly, whereas the explicit aim of Spinoza's theological argument as a whole is to remove philosophy from theology as the cause of intra-theological disagreements. When it comes to interpreting the Bible, Maimonides is the arch-competitor he seeks to topple.

Spinoza's refutation format resembles a mini-Chapter. First, he summarizes Maimonides' method with a view to showing its theological difficulties (7.11.21-29). Second, he asserts that Maimonides makes three suppositions that are contradicted by Spinoza's previous arguments (7.11.30-34). Finally, he shows how the aforementioned difficulties are avoided by choosing his own method over Maimonides' (7.11.35-39).

Maimonides' theological difficulties are shown by comparing his way of facing the initially perplexing character of the biblical text with Spinoza's own. Both agree that the text's intended meaning is not always clear at first glance, so that some scholarly effort is needed to recover it. For Spinoza, the meaning is recoverable on the assumption that the prophets' original, philosophically unsophisticated addressees understood them well enough; hence the scholarly task is by and large a matter of seeing how the unphilosophical mental cast of those addressees is reflected in the words of the prophets themselves—as Spinoza himself has been endeavoring to do since Chapter 1. For Maimonides, on the other hand, each biblical passage is ambiguous (or perhaps allusive) to begin with; hence the only way to arrive at what it means for certain is to discover whether or not the passage in question agrees with reason—an inherently philosophical task. If a passage's literal meaning turns out to agree with reason, then the literal meaning must be the one originally intended. If not, then the interpreter must discover some metaphorical meaning that agrees with reason, and the metaphorical rather than the literal meaning is thereby shown to have been originally intended. There is a fundamental difficulty concerning passages that teach the creation of the world, however. According to Maimonides, creation is not rationally demonstrable, yet it is the foundation of the biblical Law. Like its contrary, the eternity of the world as taught by Aristotle, creation is in the final analysis a matter of belief rather than of rational demonstration. Nevertheless as Spinoza points out, if the eternity of the world were rationally demonstrable, Maimonides would admittedly reinterpret all passages that teach creation, by assigning to them a metaphorical meaning that agrees with what is rationally demonstrable. Maimonides retains their literal meaning only because rational demonstration cannot decide the issue between creation and eternity, whereas creation unlike eternity preserves the Law. But Spinoza finds two unsatisfactory consequences here. First, if Maimonides were correct that the foundations of the Law are not fully accessible to reason, it would follow that interpreting them must be left to those who would decide its meaning by some other means. Second, since those interpreters would nevertheless make some use of rational demonstrations, they must to that extent be philosophers, who for the sake of their credibility with the vulgar must also claim inerrancy for their interpretations—a claim likely to provoke laughter rather than veneration. The unsatisfactory consequences of the Maimonidean theology, so understood, are a template for the unsatisfactory consequences of the Christian theology with which the *Treatise* began.

Be that as it may, the core of Spinoza's refutation of Maimonides is that Maimonides makes three suppositions that are incompatible with the *Treatise*'s argument so far. First, as against what Spinoza has argued in Chapter 2, Maimonides is said to suppose that the prophets agreed among themselves in all matters and—or perhaps because—they were competent philosophers. Second, as against what Spinoza has argued earlier in

Chapter 7, Maimonides is said to suppose that we cannot recover the meaning of the biblical tenets by simply staying within the biblical text. Finally, Maimonides is also said to suppose that we are allowed to interpret the literal meaning of biblical passages to suit our own prior opinions. Spinoza's peremptory appeal to previous steps in his own argument relieves him, though perhaps not us, of the burden of wondering what Maimonides might have said in reply. A Maimonidean reply to Spinoza's first point, for example, might be that the prophets may well have agreed among themselves in all matters (despite their obvious rhetorical differences) for the simple reason that they understood all matters through the eyes of the Law, with which they agreed unhesitatingly—even though they may also have gone beyond the letter of the Law in both their public speeches and their private thoughts for the purpose of defending the Law. Similarly, a Maimonidean reply to Spinoza's second point might be that in going beyond the letter of the Law in the aforementioned manner, the post-Mosaic prophets by Spinoza's own account did not thereby misunderstand the literal meaning of any of the passages of the Pentateuch, or convey such a misunderstanding to their immediate addressees: might not the same be so, then, for still later interpreters as well? Last but not least, a Maimonidean reply to Spinoza's third point might be that, likewise by Spinoza's own account, the post-Mosaic prophets interpreted the the literal meaning of, say, the laws concerning sacrifices to suit their own or their addressees' prior opinions on a rhetorical level—again without necessarily being oblivious to the meaning of those laws per se: are not such rhetorical accommodations possible for subsequent interpreters also, Maimonides included? Spinoza's bypassing consideration of these and other possible Maimonidean replies seems to have more to do with his keeping to the momentum of his own theologico-political thought-experiment, i.e., with executing its steps consistently and efficiently, than with his having demonstrated that his critique of Maimonides is unanswerable.

Ultimately, then, Spinoza's reasons for leaving Maimonides behind are practical. On the basis of what he has said in the foregoing, he dismisses the Maimonidean approach as "harmful, useless and absurd" (7.11.39). By its harmfulness, he appears to mean its depriving unphilosophical readers of arriving at certainty about the biblical teaching by way of a straightforward reading; by its uselessness, its inability to explain with certainty those biblical tenets whose truth is indemonstrable and which make up the bulk of the text; and by its absurdity, not just its incompatibility with what Spinoza has demonstrated earlier in Chapter 7, but especially Maimonides' freely deviating from the strict literalism by which Spinoza's own method is guided. Spinoza's dismissal of Maimonides is underwritten by an implicit promise to show, in contrast, the benefit, usefulness and reasonableness of his own method. He endeavors to follow through on this promise in the next four Chapters by outlining case histories of the Pentateuch and the Early Prophets (Ch. 8-9), and of the remainder of the Old Testament (Ch. 10) and of the New Testament (Ch. 11), before arriving at what his method lets us know for certain about the overall teaching of the Bible (Ch. 12-15). The certainty Spinoza has in mind becomes possible if and only if he has first reduced the Bible to a set of manageable historical documents, as the present Chapter has endeavored to do. This step—step seven by our count—requires in turn both Spinoza's brief encounter with,

and his hasty departure from, Maimonides.

**Step 8: No Autographs in the Dodecateuch**[54]

> ...Ibn Ezra's words, which are found in his comments on Deuteronomy, are these.... *'Beyond the Jordan,' etc. Provided that you understand the mystery of the twelve, as well as 'And Moses wrote the law,' 'And the Canaanite was then in the land,' 'On God's mountain it shall be revealed,' also 'Behold his bed, a bed of iron' as well, then you shall know the truth.* With these few words, however, he indicates, and at the same time shows, that it was not Moses who wrote the Pentateuch, but someone else who lived long after, and furthermore that the book Moses wrote was another one. [8.1.8-10]

In Chapter 8, Spinoza picks up a rabbinic precursor in Ibn Ezra, whose cryptic comments on Deuteronomy 1:2—our eighth "aphorism"—point tacitly to the unsettling conclusion that Moses was not the author of the five books traditionally ascribed to him. Spinoza spells out the arguments Ibn Ezra had merely hinted at, and adds several of his own (8.1.7-26, 27-58). He goes on to show, by similar arguments, that the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are not autographic either but, together with the Book of Ruth, were written by a single author, namely, as he conjectures, the biblical Ezra (8.1.59-72, 73-83, 84-98). He waits till Chapter 9 before answering the question whether that author succeeded in finishing the job he started—a question to be answered in the negative (8.1.99). Meanwhile Spinoza opens his argument in Chapter 8 by emphasizing its dependence on Chapter 7's identifying the Bible's "foundations and principles" with its straightforward history, and laments the flawed condition of the foundations themselves (8.1.1-6). He worries about being up to the task of restoring them here and now. He may, he says, be too late. The point of Spinoza's worry is that restoring the foundations would require radically reconstructing them. That Spinoza proceeds with the reconstruction anyway has the practical effect of prying himself and his reader further from traditional theology by philological means.

Spinoza's philological assessment of the condition of the biblical text differs from Ibn Ezra's, in the first instance, by its outspokenness. Ibn Ezra had quietly pointed to six passages implying that someone besides Moses wrote the Pentateuch and that what Moses actually wrote was different (8.1.9-26): Moses himself never went "beyond the Jordan" (Dt. 1:2); Moses' own book was small enough to fit the circumference of a single altar (Dt. 27); the Pentateuch speaks of Moses in the third person (Dt. 31:9); Moses lived before the expulsion of the Canaanites (cf. Gen. 12:6); the Pentateuch names Mt. Moriah anachronistically (Gen. 22:14); and Moses' farewell speech also contains anachronisms (Dt. 3:11, 13-14). Spinoza pointedly adds seven sets of passages of his own. Four indicate even more decisively that Moses did not write the Pentateuch: the Pentateuch not only speaks of Moses in the third person but also characterizes and biographizes him; besides narrating his death and funeral, it

[54] For this term, see Robert D. Sacks, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Lewiston, N.Y Mellen, 1990), 243.

compares him with later prophets; it names places anachronistically; and it narrates events long after Moses lived (8.1.27-42a). Three other sets of passages pinpoint Moses' actual writings—*The Wars of the Lord* and related matters, *The Book of the Compact*, and *The Book of the Law of God* (8.1.42b-58). Spinoza goes beyond Ibn Ezra, however, not only by speaking forthrightly but also by castigating the rabbinic tradition as custodian of the biblical text. He complains against a rabbinic paraphrast's misleading rendering of Joshua 24:26 into the Aramaic vernacular (8.1.48-50): whereas the biblical Hebrew speaks of Joshua's inserting words he himself had written into the book of the Law, the Aramaic has him merely safeguarding those words by the book of the Law. Presumably the paraphrast had wished to avoid the implication that Joshua was altering a Law that by its own stipulation was supposed to remain as is (cf. Dt. 4:2, 12:32); but Spinoza's complaint is that the paraphrast has thereby denied what the Bible literally says and forged a new one out of his own brain. The complaint illustrates Spinoza's larger worry in Chapter 8—not just that the biblical text has come down to us flawed, but that in their creative endeavor to make sense of it traditional interpreters have distorted it further (8.1.3). Spinoza's philological reconstruction aims to remove the traditional distortions once and for all. It would make the Bible theologically tamper-proof.

### Step 9: The Fragmentariness of the Dodecateuch

> If someone were only to pay attention to this fact—that all the precepts and histories in these five books are narrated indiscriminately and without order, and there is no plan of the times, and one and the same history is often repeated, sometimes differently—he will easily recognize that they were all gathered and accumulated indiscriminately, so as to be more easily examined and reduced to order afterwards. Yet not only these things that are contained in the five books, but also the remaining histories down to the devastation of the city, which are contained in the remaining seven books, have been gathered in the same mode. [9.1.21-22]

The philological flaws in the biblical text turn out to be even worse than Spinoza has already disclosed. Not only are the various books of the Dodecateuch not autographic, but as they stand they are little more than haphazard compilations—unfinished and poorly preserved (9.1.3-58a, 58b-121).

That they are unfinished, Spinoza establishes by a more or less self-contained argument, of which our ninth "aphorism" is the centerpiece. He introduces this argument by observing that the Dodecateuch as we have it contains extensive narrative passages that are more or less identical with passages in the Books of Chronicles (9.1.3-10a). He adds his regret over the lack of outside evidence to show conclusively that the Dodecateuch passages have originated either in Chronicles or in some further source. To ascertain nevertheless that the Dodecateuch has been compiled from outside sources, he proceeds to show disorder and disconnection, contradictory incidents, and ill-fitting dates and times within the Dodecateuch, and likewise within Chronicles

(9.1.11-21a, 21b-26, 27-48, 49-56). Finally, to confirm his findings, he challenges anyone who still disputes the fragmentariness of those books to come up with an alternative hypothesis that would reconcile the discrepancies he has shown (9.1.57-58a). His argument is meant to silence any challenger. The same intent is evident in his parallel argument for the poorly preserved state of the text. He points at length to its many variant readings and truncated passages (9.1.66-115, 116-21 with 33-36). Meanwhile he polemicizes against rabbinic attempts to explain the textual variants and gaps as mysteries intended by the text, instead of merely as philological phenomena (9.1.58b-65, 101, 108, 117-18). As his previous polemic in Chapter 8 has castigated the rabbis' philologically unwarranted distortion of the text, so his present polemic castigates their philologically unwarranted inferences from the text. He waits to finish his survey of philological case histories in Chapters 8-11, before trimming those excesses in Chapters 12-15 by remodeling old-fashioned biblical theology on the basis of the newfound philology.

**Step 10: Piggybacking Theology onto Philology**

> ... [T]he Book of Daniel ...without a doubt, on the basis of chapter 8, contains the writings of Daniel himself. Where the first seven chapters were from, however, I do not know. We can suspect that they were from the Chronologies of the Chaldeans, inasmuch as, except for the first, they are written in Chaldean. If this were to be clearly established, it would be very enlightening attestation for evincing that Scripture is only sacred to the extent that through it we understand the matters signified in it, and not to the extent that we understood the words or language and speeches by which the matters are signified. And, besides, the books that teach and narrate the best things, in whatever language and by whatever nation they were ultimately written, are equally sacred. [10.2.7-10]

A sign of Spinoza's intent to refit the old theology to the new philology is the order in which he now treats the case histories of "the remaining books of the Old Testament" (10.1.1). Instead of the traditional order followed by either Jewish or Christian Bibles, he groups the books according to their likely dates of composition. He begins with five books that he shows to have been written during the period of the second temple—I and II Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes (10.1.2-12). He then shifts to the books of the literary prophets—singling out Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Jonah—which he shows to consist of narrative fragments derived in part from Chronicles, etc. (10.1.13-31). Subsequently he turns to Job, whose origins he shows to be controversial and ultimately conjectural, and afterwards to four other books—Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah—all four of which he shows to have been written by the author of Ezra (10.2.1-6, 7-27). Having established what can be known for certain about the dates of each of the foregoing, he goes on to consider literary flaws that would indicate the haste of their authors (10.2.28). Some flaws are evident from the variant readings found in marginal annotations, as in the Dodecateuch;

these Spinoza sees no need to treat further (10.2.29-30, with 9.1.65-115). He limits himself here to exposing unannotated flaws that he discovers in Ezra and Nehemiah—miscalculations in tallying population counts and mix-ups in recording proper names (10.2.31-44, 45-53). At least half his remarks about these, in either case, consist of polemicizing against traditional commentators in the manner we have already seen in Chapters 8-9 (10.2.38-44, 49-52). Following all these case histories, Spinoza concludes that canonization must have been decided by a council of Pharisees sometime after the Maccabean rededication of the second temple (10.2.54-61). Finally, after disclaiming the philological wherewithal for restoring the foundations of the New Testament as he has done for the Old, he promises some pertinent remarks in Chapter 11 anyway (10.2.62-64).

Meanwhile our tenth "aphorism" serves as a reminder that the motive for Spinoza's biblical foundation-repair is only partly philological. It is also theological. During the course of his treatment of the Book of Daniel, he goes out of his way to draw a more than philological inference from his suspicion that Daniel 2-7, being written in Chaldean rather than Hebrew, must have some otherwise unknown Chaldean source (10.2.8-11). If so, he infers, it would provide enlightening evidence that the sacredness of the biblical books, or any books, is not coextensive with how far we understand its "words and language and speeches," but with how far we understand from these philological details the theological teaching they are meant to convey. However that may be, having temporarily withdrawn the biblical text from theological use for philological refurbishing, Spinoza now makes it available once again in its reconditioned form. The resurfacing of theology on newly solidified philological foundations, we may speak of as step ten of the *Treatise*'s theological argument.

### Step 11: Prophets versus Teachers

> No one who reads the New Testament can doubt that the Apostles were Prophets. But since the Prophets did not always speak from revelation, but on the contrary did so quite rarely, as we showed at the end of Chapter 1, we can doubt whether the Apostles wrote the Epistles as Prophets, from revelation and expressed command, as did Moses, Jeremiah, and the others, or, rather, as private men or—especially since in I Corinthians 14:6, Paul indicates two kinds of preaching, one from revelation, the other from knowledge; and therefore, I say, it is to be doubted whether, in the Epistles, they prophesy or, in truth, teach. [11.1.1-2]

At first glance, Chapter—or step—11 seems the simplest one so far. It answers the philological question posed by our eleventh "aphorism." Namely, did the Apostles write as prophets, or only as teachers? Spinoza's answer is that although the Apostles were also prophets, they wrote only as teachers (11.1.3-43). That is, each exercised an independent judgment about how to propagate the faith. This answer leads Spinoza to show how Apostles were unlike prophets in two ways. On the one hand, they reasoned or debated rather than declaimed (11.1.3-20). On the other hand, they were never

commanded exactly what or where to teach (11.1.21-43). A further doubt remains, however. Namely, how could they teach revealed matters by means of nothing more than their own "natural knowledge" (11.1.44)? Spinoza's all-too-brief answer is threefold (11.1.45-61). First, each Apostle based his teaching only on his own experiences and on prior revelations—presumably the Old Testament's and the Gospels'—which he was able to analyze historically and spell out to willing audiences on his own (11.1.46). Second, in narrating the simple history (or story) of Christ, each sought to bring out its moral lessons, which are its main point (11.1.47). Third, each deliberately accommodated his teaching to what his audiences could grasp in common (11.1.48-61). Spinoza prefaces this threefold answer by saying that it follows with "no difficulty" from what he has already said about Bible interpretion in Chapter 7 (11.1.45). He thus invites our consideration of how each sub-answer incorporates the *Treatise*'s larger philological argument.

First, as regards the basis of their teaching, the Apostles share with Chapter 7's biblical hermeneutic a quasi-detachment from the rest of the Bible. They taught the Bible's revealed or prophetic statements and narratives, though not in a revealed or prophetic manner. They were, to that extent, observers and analysts rather than simple devotees and defenders of the Bible. The Apostles' approach to the Old Testament and the Gospels is thus an intra-biblical precedent for the *Treatise*'s approach to the Bible as a whole. Nevertheless the Apostles subordinated their observations and analyses to a pious devotion to and defense of the Bible, i.e., to Christian apologetics, whereas the *Treatise* maintains that a studied neutrality is both necessary and possible. From the *Treatise*'s point of view, the difference is between looking devoutly for prooftexts in support of Christian faith and looking philologically for whatever "sentences" (or "tenets") happen to occur in and among the biblical narratives. The *Treatise* aims at gradually replacing its reader's pious or sectarian concern with prooftexts, in favor of a philosophical or scientific concern with "sentences" (or "tenets") and their intra-textual implications as such.

Second, as regards the Apostles' concentrating on Christ's moral lessons, the Gospels themselves conveniently summarize these in the Sermon on the Mount (11.1.8). According to a passing remark in Chapter 7, however, the same moral lessons are demonstrably true quite apart from whether or not the Bible teaches them (7.1.13-14). It follows that demonstrating that they are true and demonstrating that the Bible in fact teaches them are two separate demonstrations. The *Treatise* itself supplies only the latter demonstration. The former is left to the *Ethics*.[55] We may therefore describe the *Treatise*'s philological Chapters as resting on the untraditional premise that the biblical text is not the sole, nor even the best conveyor of the moral lessons it contains, but only the one most familiar to us through inherited belief (cf. 1.5.2-3). This premise underlies the remainder of its theological argument as well. Ultimately, Chapter 15 will endeavor to help the reader sort out the theologico-political confusions with which the *Treatise* began, by separating once and for all the theological teachings familiar to us through inherited belief, on the one hand, from our "acquir[ing] the habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone" (15.1.67), i.e., from philosophy

[55] Cf , e.g., 4.3.5-7 with *Ethics*, Pt III, Preface (*Opera*, II, 137-38).

or science, on the other.

Third, as for each Apostle's deliberately accommodating his teaching to his given audience, Chapter 11 goes on to infer a biblical imprimatur for the freedom to teach despite disagreements among teachers (11.1.48b-61). The disagreement between the Apostles Paul and James over whether human beings are justified by faith or by works, for example, is relegated to a pedagogical disagreement, a disgreement over means rather than ends. More exactly, the Apostles are said to have "built the religion upon different foundations" or "upon foundations very well recognized and accepted at the time" (11.1.59). The *Treatise* understands differences between one teacher and another as differences in how to construe, or construct, the subject matter at hand for adaptation to its various addressees. Thus Paul, in preaching to the gentiles of his time, added a quasi-philosophical component to his apologetics to make the Gospels more accessible to them, while those who preached to the Jews had no need to, especially since Jews as such consider philosophy contemptible (11.1.60). The intrusion of philosophy into biblical theology, it seems, started with the Apostles themselves. By looking at biblical theology in general and its Pauline version in particular as constructs, built on freely chosen foundations, Spinoza can deconstruct it with a view to isolating and removing its putatively extraneous elements here and now.

**Step 12: Holiness as a Means**

> A thing is called sacred and divine which is designated for the exercise of piety and religion; and it will be sacred only so long as human beings use it religiously. For if they cease to be pious, it ceases at the same time to be sacred as well. And if they dedicate that item to perpetrating impious things, then that same item that was sacred before, is rendered unclean and profane. [12.2.1]

Is Spinoza an atheist? He preempts his old-fashioned theological opponents by raising this accusation rather abruptly at the outset of Chapter 12 (12.1.1-10). The evidence they are likely to shout against him is the philology of Chapters 7-11, which leads to the conclusion that the biblical text is corrupt and, therefore, an unreliable source for God's word. In his defense, Spinoza claims on biblical authority that the biblical text and God's word are not the same. Whereas the former is written in parchment and ink, the latter is written only on the human heart, i.e., in the mind in the form of the "idea" of God. Chapter 12 undergirds Spinoza's defense with three arguments (12.1.11-12). First—as our twelfth "aphorism" says—what makes something holy is its usefulness for promoting piety (12.2.1-16). Second, God's word in the non-metaphorical and non-sectarian meaning of the term is the same as the universal divine law treated in Chapter 4 (12.2.17-41a). Third, this last remains impervious to corruption or distortion (12.2.41b-54). Spinoza adds that any adulterations or faults found in the biblical text—whether in the details of some history or prophecy which has been adapted for homiletical purposes, or in putative miracles recorded for anti-philosophical purposes, or in quasi-theoretical matters

inserted anachronistically for sectarian purposes—are irrelevant to its being God's word, as he promises to show more fully in Chapter 13 (12.2.55-61).

Spinoza's preemptive strike against his opponents is not entirely abrupt, however. Consider that Chapter 11 has concluded by remarking with evident wishfulness that our age would be happy indeed if it could free itself from all superstition (11.1.60). In turn, Chapter 12 begins by anticipating theological opposition whose root cause is superstition in the form of venerating the letter of the biblical text while ignoring the message of the text (12.1.5-6). Chapter 11's concluding remark had followed on the heels of Spinoza's calling attention to the Apostles who, preaching to the Jews in particular, "taught a religion stripped of philosophical theories" (11.1.60). It could not help suggesting the following analogy: just as those Apostles were able to build and spread theologies free of philosophical embellishments to suit the mentality of their time, so too we might be able nowadays to build and spread one free of superstitious embellishments as well (cf. 11.1.61). Nevertheless Chapter 12 immediately shows that analogy to be contrary to fact. That is, in case the elaborate philology of Chapters 7-11 has charmed the reader into forgetting the *Treatise*'s starting-point, he is reminded by the shouting of Spinoza's opponents that superstition is at bottom ineradicable from public life, so that the *Treatise*'s thought-experiment must confine itself for all practical purposes to the philosophical question of how it is to be contained (12.1.1-2; cf. P.1.1-2.4, 6.1-2). Far from purporting to provide a cure-all for superstition, then, Chapter 12's removing holiness from the words of the biblical text and from outward worship as such is only one step—step twelve—of the multi-step containment process being proposed by the *Treatise*. Just because this step by itself is unlikely to persuade his opponents here and now, at least so long as they keep shouting, Spinoza goes on to consider what further steps might at least quiet them down.

### Step 13: God as Moral Exemplar

> ... God through the Prophets seeks from human beings no other knowledge of himself but the knowledge of his divine Justice and Charity—that is, such attributes of God as human beings can imitate by a certain plan of living.... [13.1.26]

Our thirteenth "aphorism" indicates how, from a theological point of view, Spinoza proposes living cheek by jowl alongside those with whom it is impossible to see eye to eye. He appeals to the authority of the biblical text (13.1.1-10). What God wants there is simply put. The be-all and end-all of the biblical teaching, we are told, is love of neighbor. As we have already seen, of course, Spinoza's showing the simplicity of the biblical teaching depends on a number of complicated steps. He begins Chapter 13 with brief reminders of relevant premises arrived at in earlier Chapters: that revelation comes via the prophet's imagination rather than his intellect (Ch. 2); that the Bible corroborates its teaching with miracles and histories (or stories) rather than arguments (Ch. 5); and that any difficulties in understanding the Bible are philological rather

than philosophical (Ch. 7). These premises serve as footholds for resisting the view that the Bible contains humanly inexplicable mysteries, which old-fashioned theologians nevertheless try to penetrate by imputing to it philosophical insights that turn out instead to be derivative from Aristotle or Plato and the like. To refute his opponents' view head-on, Spinoza's remaining theological Chapters undertake to convince anyone who still doubts his overall argument that the biblical teaching is inherently unphilosophical. Chapter, or step, 13 proceeds by way of ascertaining that the Bible's intent is strictly moral and not intellectual.

That the Bible aims to inculcate moral obedience rather than philosophical or scientific understanding follows from two inferences Spinoza draws concerning the philological significance of the biblical names for God (cf. 13.1.11-12). First, according to the Bible itself, knowledge of God is neither routinely bestowed on believers nor in any way commanded of them (13.1.13-25). Spinoza's evidence is Exodus 3:6, where God is said to praise the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for their faith in God's promises even though unlike Moses they were ignorant of the special name, Jehovah, by which the Bible refers to God's essence, i.e., to what God is in himself—in contrast to the name Elohim, by which it refers merely to God's power over created things. To the objection that Genesis nevertheless describes the Patriarchs as preaching in Jehovah's name, Spinoza answers by recalling the Pentateuch's use of anachronisms, as shown in Chapter 8. Exodus 3:6's use of the name Jehovah is thus attributable to its being the divine name most highly revered by the biblical writer's addressees, not by the Patriarchs themselves. Second, then, Spinoza cites its subsequent use in Jeremiah 22:15-16 and 9:23, in Exodus 34:6-7, and implicitly in I John 4:13 (the *Treatise*'s epigraph), to the effect that the practice of justice and charity is the necessary and sufficient knowledge of God incumbent on any believer (13.1.27-37). To paraphrase our thirteenth "aphorism," the Bible presents justice and charity as the sole attributes of God which human beings are both bound and able to imitate. Indeed, only because the Bible views God via revelation rather than demonstration, i.e., via the untheoretical but psychologically compelling imaginings and preconceptions of the prophets to which Spinoza has called attention in Chapter 2, does God show up as a—or the—just and charitable role model for human beings in the first place. The God of the philosophers, which post-Pauline theologians have egregiously confused with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob according to Spinoza, does not particularly care about justice and charity. In this respect, Spinoza's removing from biblical theology any and all philosophical outgrowths is meant to give it a much needed moral facelift.

### Step 14: Determining the Faith

> ...For just as Scripture was once accommodated to the grasp of the vulgar, so too each is allowed to accommodate it to his own opinions, if by that plan he sees that, in the things that have to do with justice and charity, he can obey God with a more complete consent of the spirit....[14.1.4]

Having arrived at the Chapter containing the seven dogmas of Spinoza's civil

religion, let us consider how our fourteenth "aphorism" helps explain, or at least offset, the two difficulties we noted earlier—the evident theological triviality of those dogmas and their evident moral obtuseness.

Consider first their theological triviality. As its heading indicates, Chapter 14 covers four subtopics: what faith is (14.1.6-19), who the faithful are (14.1.20-37), the foundations of faith (14.1.38-54), and the ultimate separation of faith from philosophy (14.2.1-5). The seven dogmas are the Chapter's third subtopic. As the foundations of the *Treatise*'s "universal" or non-sectarian faith and "the fundamentals of the intent of Scripture as a whole," they are to be "determined" or deduced one-by-one from definitions of faith and the faithful, Chapter 14's first two subtopics (14.1.38, with 5, 17). Yet why, we may ask, does Spinoza not rest content with establishing these dogmas on purely philological grounds? Why not just leave it at showing that they are the most frequently repeated statements in the Bible? Spinoza's answer is evident from the Chapter's introductory remarks, which recall the politically disruptive religious persecutions that have occasioned the *Treatise* to begin with (14.1.1-5; cf. P.4.1-5.18). Accordingly, the *Treatise* has undertaken the project of revamping the Bible so as to transform it from being a politically destabilizing instrument for authorizing religious persecutions into a politically salutary instrument for authorizing religious toleration. Our present "aphorism" thus asserts the Bible's infinite adaptability—in its newly restructured form, needless to say—for strengthening each believer's commitment to just and charitable works here and now. Nevertheless Spinoza's mere assertion to that effect would prove unproductive, even counterproductive, without his also "determining the dogmas of the faith...by certain rules" (14.1.17). Otherwise, as he says, "anyone will be able to introduce whatever he wants under this very pretext—that it is a necessary means for obedience." Were Spinoza to leave unresolved the controversial question of what dogmas all believers should accept, in other words, he would merely be adding fuel to the sectarian broils his *Treatise* is designed to dampen and, if possible, smother. He therefore needs to demonstrate by an indisputable logic not only that at bottom the Bible teaches no more than a bare minimum of dogmas necessary for underwriting just and charitable works, but also that those dogmas are already in place and agreed on by all believers (14.1.39-46, 36-37). Differently stated, removing hostilities among the biblical sects requires—along with Spinoza's thirteen previous steps—the further step of convincing thoughtful sectarians unanswerably that the Bible's theologically mandated mimimum is the same as its theologically mandated maximum. The triviality of his seven dogmas, once these are securely demonstrated, is thus essential to their peacekeeping role.

As for their moral obtuseness, consider how our present "aphorism" applies as well to the theological argument of the *Treatise* itself. If the Bible is open to being interpreted at will according to the opinions of its various adherents so long as the resulting interpretations reinforce the practice of justice and charity, then like the biblical text on which they are based, both biblical theology and any religious dogmas formulated by it are only means to that end. The just and charitable end sanctifies the diverse theological means. Spinoza goes so far as to say that "faith does not require true dogmas so much as pious ones, that is, such as move the spirit toward

obedience"—and adds by way of clarification, ". . . even though among them there may be many that do not have even the shadow of truth, yet so long as he who embraces them does not know they are false" (14.1.34). Spinoza's addendum implies a division of labor within theology, including or especially his own. Its task is twofold. One the one hand, it must inspire and edify by showing, for example, how the seven dogmas commit believers to the practice of justice and charity. On the other hand, in so doing it cannot help overlooking or dissembling the likelihood that such dogmas, etc., are needed for that purpose rather than simply true. It trumpets their practical necessity while muting their intellectual doubtfulness. All this is to say that, by Spinoza's own lights, the theological merit of his seven dogmas is limited to their practical efficacy in promoting just and charitable behavior among those for whom the biblical text is already authoritative. In themselves, the seven dogmas are morally indifferent component parts in the *Treatise*'s new-and-improved promotional scheme for justice and charity among present-day sectarians; they are instruments of behavior modification in biblical guise.

Chapter 14 concludes by inferring from the foregoing the ultimate immiscibility of philosophy and theology. Their mutually exclusive goals, truth versus pious obedience, rest on mutually exclusive foundations. Philosophy is based on "common notions" or axioms derived from the investigation of nature alone (14.2.2; cf. 7.1.21-22). Theology, or rather the pious faith it serves, is based on the biblical text as construed in accordance with the philology of Chapter 7. Inasmuch as there is no sub-foundation underlying these two—nature as understood by modern scientific method and the biblical text as understood by Spinoza's philological method—we seem to have reached bedrock. Spinoza's subsequent argument builds on these twin bases. He first completes his theological argument by partitioning theology from philosophy, so as to prevent unwarranted intrusions from either side (Ch. 15). He then turns to political life, where as a practical matter he expects theology and philosophy to continue to confront each other, and addresses the need for a prudent accommodation between them there (Ch. 16-20).

### Step 15: Partitioning Theology from Philosophy

> Those who do not know how to separate Philosophy from Theology dispute over whether Scripture has to serve as handmaid to reason; or reason, on the contrary, to Scripture. That is, does the sense of Scripture have to be accommodated to reason; or reason, in truth, to Scripture? Yet the latter claim is defended by the skeptics, who deny the certainty of reason; the former, by the dogmatists. But that both the skeptics and the dogmatists err totally is established from what has already been said. [15.1.1-2]

Chapter 15's partitioning of theology from philosophy is the last step of Spinoza's theological argument proper. It results at the same time in a partition between revelation and reason (15.1.1-41). Nevertheless this result does not exempt Spinoza from answering the further question of whether it is reasonable to believe in revelation (15.1.42-67).

Spinoza's partition, it seems, is not designed to keep us from passing between reason and revelation by, say, raising philosophical questions about theology or vice versa, as he himself does. It functions rather as a filter or checkpoint, with a built-in detection device to block the transporting of items from either side which are hazardous to the other.

Our fifteenth "aphorism," which opens the Chapter, thus presents the separating of theology from philosophy as a matter of sophisticated know-how, for which the previous fourteen Chapters have been prerequisites. Looked at as a whole, Spinoza's theological argument is complete once it serves to prevent border disputes concerning how far reason's and revelation's competing claims to jurisdiction over theology extend. Basically, the disputes are between those theologians he now calls dogmatists, who insist on making revelation fit the demands of reason, and those he now calls skeptics, who insist on making reason fit the demands of revelation (15.1.1-6). Spinoza has been elaborating a theological instruction manual for conflict resolution. On the assumption that Chapter 7's refutation of Maimonides *et al.* is sufficient for putting the dogmatists in their proper place, he now proceeds to evaluate the claim of the skeptics (15.1.7-41). The skeptics' position is largely a defensive one, an attempt like Spinoza's own to prevent the dogmatic encroachment of philosophical teachings onto the teachings of the Bible: Spinoza chooses as its spokesman one Judah Alfakhar, an obscure near-contemporary and critic of Maimonides'.[56] Yet Spinoza does not side with the skeptics. According to the argument of Chapter 15, they too overstep their bounds and must be made to toe the line.

Like Chapter 7's refutation of Maimonides, Spinoza's refutation of the skeptics resembles a mini-Chapter. He first reduces their claim to two premises; he then invalidates each premise "in order"; finally, he reflects on his having "exploded" both theological skepticism and theological dogmatism (15.1.8-21, 22-34, 35-41). The skeptics' premises are products of their inept reaction to the Maimonidean claim that we must protect reason against the encroachments of revelation by interpreting the biblical teachings metaphorically rather than literally whenever these are inconsistent with reason. The skeptics counter that, to protect revelation in turn against the encroachments of reason, we may interpret metaphorically if and only if we find biblical teachings that are inconsistent with one another. The skeptics' premises are as follows. First, every expressly stated biblical teaching is *ipso facto* true. Second, while no expressly stated teachings are directly inconsistent with one another, inconsistencies sometimes appear between an expressly stated and an implicitly stated teaching, and these may removed by interpreting the implicitly stated teaching metaphorically (15.1.8, 19). Spinoza invalidates the first premise by showing expressly stated teachings that are inconsistent with reason—e.g., that God is jealous, that God occupies a place (15.1.22-27). He invalidates the second premise by pointing out not only that we cannot always decide which of two inconsistent teachings is being stated implicitly rather than expressly—e.g., whether God never changes his mind (I Sam. 15:29) or whether he sometimes does (Jer. 18:8, 10)—but also that inconsistencies are hardly removed by merely imposing metaphorical interpretations onto biblical passages that

[56] See Jacob Adler, "Letters of Judah Alfakhar and David Kimchi," *Studia Spinozana* 12 (1996): 141-67.

may not warrant them, as is the case, Spinoza recalls, with the many mutually inconsistent passages he has cited in Chapters 2, 9 and 10 (15.1.28-34). In sum, given that revelation and reason fail to fit together smoothly whether we side with the skeptics or whether with the dogmatists, Spinoza advises adhering to the separation between philosophy and theology which he has already worked out.

The Chapter's concluding justification of religious belief conforms to the stipulated separation by not straying into either the dogmatists' or the skeptics' camp. Spinoza adopts a neutral position, a fence-sitting that lets him serve as beacon to both. His words are readily, though differently, grasped by either. On the one hand, he warns the dogmatists and reassures the skeptics that no philosophical argument for religious belief is "mathematically" sound, i.e., deductively airtight (15.1.45, 56-58). On the other hand, he counters the skeptics and assuages the dogmatists with the theological insufficiency of blind faith, inasmuch as otherwise we risk embracing revelation "foolishly" and "without judgment" (15.1.42). That the middle ground Spinoza stakes out between philosophy and theology is not simply a no-man's land, moreover, is indicated by his repeated appeal to the need for "judgment" on the part of dogmatists and skeptics alike (15.1.44, 56). Although or because either side's theological defense of revelation has collapsed under his withering attack, he supplies a third, safer if less ambitious alternative. Practically speaking, he argues, it is both necessary and possible for dogmatists and skeptics to share the prophets' sincere conviction that biblical revelation is meant to foster the believer's unswerving devotion to justice and charity. It is possible, since two of the three ingredients of the prophets' moral certainty as shown in Chapter 2—their public appeal to signs certifying their moral authority (in accord with the restrictions of Dt. 13 and 18) and their private penchant for equity and goodness—are able to persuade us nowadays just as convincingly via the biblical text as those same two ingredients together with the third—the prophets' rhetorically compelling imagery—were able to persuade their original audiences. And it is necessary since, in the wake of Spinoza's dismantling of both dogmatism and skepticism, no further theological support for biblical revelation has been left standing. Even so, inasmuch as Spinoza has concluded his theological Chapters by showing that belief in revelation is defensible by means of sound practical judgment rather than by means of strict philosophical argument, he has by the same token shown that it is irrefutable by means of strict philosophical argument.

## Spinoza's Ongoing Need for Theology

Briefly summarized, the *Treatise*'s first fifteen Chapters have sought to separate philosophy from theology and show as a result that theology does not stand in the way of anyone's freedom of philosophizing (16.1.1). Let us now see how far these Chapters let us answer our original questions about Spinoza's scattered self-references in the *Treatise*, which first prompted us to look at its argument as a whole.

One question was why Spinoza makes it a point of personal honor to solicit (albeit anonymously) the moral approval of his philosopher reader. We may now discern a larger moral motive behind that solicitation. By systematically purging philosophy

from the reader's understanding of the Bible in particular, Spinoza can reconstruct the Bible's strictly moral teaching in terms of tenets that are neutral to sectarian differences and therefore immune to sectarian disputes. In that way, he rehabilitates biblical religion to serve as a civil religion. Still, he has not yet spelled out why, given the sectarian conflicts the Bible has long occasioned, the reader should continue to bow to its moral teaching at all. Facing this side of the question would require him to engage in further reflections about society as such. Such is the task to which Spinoza devotes the *Treatise*'s last five Chapters.

A second question was why Spinoza himself remains aloof from both Judaism and Christianity. The *Treatise* approaches this why-question as a how-question. Its argument takes us Chapter by Chapter through fifteen steps—from biblical prophecy as the unphilosophical basis of Judaism and Christianity alike, to the separating of philosophy and theology as mutually exclusive alternatives. With theology now divorced from philosophy, direct cooperation between them can no longer be taken for granted. Philosophers henceforth are knowers only and not believers. Theologians are believers only and not knowers. Accordingly, Spinoza recognizes no strictly philosophical reason for any apostate or excommunicant (like himself) to return to, say, Judaism, and no strictly theological reason for anyone guided by the freedom of philosophizing (like himself) to convert to, say, Christianity. Choosing either religion—or, by implication, neither—is rather a matter of practical judgment. Again, Spinoza's larger theologico-political considerations here concern society as such, to which he turns in Chapters 16-20.

The *Treatise*'s half-answers so far to both aforementioned questions point to the third question with which we began: Why does political society still need biblical religion? Because the *Treatise* goes on to treat this question in five Chapter-sized steps, we shall try to follow these as we have followed the previous fifteen, by way of an appropriate "aphorism" drawn from each Chapter.

**Step 16: The Law of Nature as the Law of the Jungle**

> ...it is certain that nature, considered absolutely, has the highest right to everything it can do; that is, the right of nature extends as far as its power extends. For the power of nature is the very power of God, who has the highest right to everything. But since the universal power of the whole of nature is nothing besides the power of all individuals together, hence it follows that each individual has the highest right to everything it can do, or that the right of each extends as far as its determinate power extends. And since the highest law of nature is that each thing endeavor, as much as is in it, to persevere in its state—and do so by taking no account of another but only of itself—hence it follows that each individual has the highest right to this, that is (as I have said), to exist and operate just as it has been determined to naturally. [16.2.3]

To judge by its title, Chapter 16 discusses the foundations of political society in

three stages: each individual's natural right, each individual's civil right, and the right of the "highest"[57] or ruling powers (cf. 16.2.1-6.20, 7.1-15, 8.1-24). The Chapter as a whole is the first step of an orderly inquiry, culminating in Chapter 20, into how far freedom of thought and self-expression extends in the "best Republic" (16.1.2-3). The best republic turns out to be a democracy (16.6.2, 7-8, 15-18). Overall, Spinoza's argument favors what we today call a liberal democracy. Here—to paraphrase the title of Chapter 20—each is free to think what he likes and say what he thinks. At first glance, our present Chapter seems to stop far short of allowing that freedom, since the third stage of its discussion subsumes all "divine right," or organized religion, under the jurisdiction of the ruling powers. Nevertheless the details of the discussion point to the conclusion that if and only if organized religion remains under the thumb of the political can the freedom in question be safeguarded.

What is striking about the detailed discussion of Chapter 16 is that its three stages do not line up exactly in sequence. At what appears to be the transition from natural right (stage one) to civil right (stage two), Spinoza says that the foundations and right of the ruling powers (stage three) have already been adequately shown (16.6.20-7.1). The Chapter's discussion of natural right likewise upstages its discussion of civil right, by differentiating slaves and children from subjects (16.6.10-14, 7.4, 8-10). In short, the discussions of natural right, civil right and the right of the ruling powers overlap. While the Chapter gives the initial impression that it will first derive civil right from natural right and afterward derive the right of the ruling powers from these, the very terms of the discussion—"highest" instead of ruling powers, for example—depend on an offstage analysis of political life and human nature designed to fit the above-board argument. The situation resembles Chapter 1, where what looked like a simple gathering of textual evidence proved to rest on a prior analysis of the biblical text in terms of its *sententiae* ("tenets" or "sentences"). Here too Spinoza takes his bearings by a distinctive term that has been implicit in the discussion of political matters ever since the Preface: *imperium* ("imperium" or, occasionally, "empire").

In Roman law, an imperium is originally a military commander's administrative authority over conquered territory. Subsequently it refers to any magistrate's jurisdiction for exercising judicial and executive powers.[58] Spinoza stretches the term to cover not just all of political life but nature as well. Spinoza's "imperium" straddles the natural and the political. On the one hand, he speaks of human beings apart from political society as living under the "imperium of nature" (16.2.6, 8, 3.3). On the other hand, he identifies the right to rule exclusively with those who hold the "highest imperium" (16.6.1), and defines an enemy as an outsider who does not recognize the "imperium of the city" (16.7.9; cf. 16.3.3, 6.3). How the term guides the Chapter's entire

[57] For the term "highest power [*summa potestas*]," see P.3.3, 5.14, 7.1; 2.9.12; 7.11.41; 16.5 17, 6.3-6, 9, 12, 14, 20, 7.2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 15, 8.10, 15; 17 1 1, 6-7, 9-10, 2.2; 18.4.4, 6; 19.1.1-2, 6, 21, 2.6-7, 9-10, 16-17, 19-20, 22, 26, 33, 3.2, 17; 20 2.2, 3.3, 4 6, 8-10, 13, 5 1, 6.1, 3, 7 2, 6, 7, 8.2; A.2, 33.

[58] See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "imperium." For its Machiavellian adaptation, to which Spinoza seems indebted, see Leo Paul S. de Alvarez, *The Machiavellian Enterprise: A Commentary on* The Prince (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 9, and the translator's note on *l'imperio* in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. de Alvarez (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Wavelend Press, 1989), 6f. n. 4. Cf. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* II 17 (*Opera*, III, 282).

three-stage discussion may be seen in the light of our sixteenth "aphorism."

It treats natural right as an individual matter. Nature is said to consist entirely of individuals, human and non-human. Each strives to persist in its current "state," i.e., status or condition, even or especially at the expense of other individuals. Everything it does to that effect is done with the highest right, since it cannot help acting on the basis of laws of nature which "determine" or govern its power, and the power of nature is the same as the power of God, whose might is his right. An individual's natural right thus coincides with its power. Fish, for example, have the right to the water they swim in, and bigger fish to the smaller ones they eat (16.2.2). Spinoza says nothing about fish fleeing from predators or staying in schools. Natural right belongs neither to the victimized nor to the cooperative as such, but only to those that acquire or possess, by whatever means the laws of nature or God put at each's disposal. Naturally, each behaves as a possessive individualist. Under the imperium of nature, possession is *ipso facto* right for as long as it lasts.

A political imperium too is a possession. It is something that designated individuals either "hold," "retain," "defend," "preserve," etc., or else "lose" (16.6.4-6, 7.5, 8, 8.20).[59] Spinoza's theoretical account of how an imperium is acquired—its "foundations"—is geared to his practical advice about how it is maintained. The link between theory and practice here is secured by two premises, supplied parenthetically (see 16.5.4). The first is that each individual is driven by appetites that pull him in various directions. The second is that no one wants to appear mindless or unreasonable. According to Spinoza's first premise, each of us is a bundle of potentially conflicting drives; according to the second, each of us is nevertheless driven to avoid the embarrassment of seeming to be in conflict with ourselves. When combined, the two premises suggest that we are each open to new advice about how to satisfy our various drives, so long as it looks useful in our own eyes and consistent in the eyes of others (cf. 16.5.6-7). Such is the plane on which Spinoza conducts his political argument proper. He offers a plan (*ratio*) for restraining and redirecting natural drives as necessary for our individual self-preservation and self-esteem. An "imperium" is the political centerpiece of Spinoza's plan. Putting our lives and reputations in the hands of possessive political authorities, he argues, both satisfies and enhances our natural egoism.

Humans acquire a political imperium not by leaving behind the natural one in which they originally find themselves but by building a more or less sustainable shelter within it. If the laws of nature are Spinoza's gloss on the law of the jungle, political imperiums remain exposed to that jungle. They originate in the fact that individuals find living simply by the law of the jungle self-defeating. The remedy is a collective agreement to behave rationally and not just instinctively. Each must promise, among other things, to suppress any appetite that would result in harming another, to avoid doing to another what he dislikes done to himself, and to defend another's right as his own. Still, under nature's imperium anyone is free to break his promises, however rational, or promise insincerely if he believes it suits his self-interest.

[59] Cf. P.1.16, 18; 2.9 33; 3.5 1, 66; 5.1.4, 14, 17n, 2.1, 12-15, 3.2-5, 5.1, 5.1.4, 2.15; 6.1.78; 8.1.67; 17.3.1, 4 8, 13, 5.1, 23, 24, 12 52, 57; 18 3 5; 19.1.1-2, 6, 10, 17, 2 10, 17, 20, 29, 31, 3.4, 8; 20.6.1, 7 6; with 3.5.63, 5.1 22-23, 17.12.27.

Disincentives must therefore be added. Besides embarrassment at the irrationality of going against prior promises, which however is not enough to deter most individuals from doing so anyway, there is fear of overwhelming retaliation. Each's promises must accordingly be part of a larger compact to transfer all his right or power to society. As the exclusive holder of everyone's artificially combined right or power, i.e., of the political imperium, society can then impose laws and enforce them by punishments. Two further disincentives minimize the risk that the resulting highest powers—the self-interested individuals in charge of the imperium proper—will impose laws that are "absurd," or inconsistent with the terms of the compact (cf. 16.6.4-9). For one thing, absurd laws go against the highest powers' own self-interest, by dissolving public trust in the usefulness of the imperium and motivating subjects to revert to their merely instinctive behavior. Also, the likelihood of arriving at absurd laws lessens to the degree that the imperium is democratic, since large assemblies rarely agree on any law without at least some rational discussion.

Maintaining an imperium thus involves maintaining an equilibrium. On the one hand, the highest powers must impose laws that are consistent with the original compact. On the other hand, they must consult or appease the diverse and fluctuating self-interest of subjects, to keep their ongoing consent. Chapter 16 underwrites the autonomy of the highest powers, even as it places the burden entirely on them both to act in line with the compact and to anticipate the likely effects of their actions on the behavior of subjects, who continue to be governed as well by the laws of nature. To steady their hold on the imperium, then, the highest powers must either know something of the laws of nature or else welcome the advice of those who do. Spinoza obligingly offers user-friendly definitions of "civil right" and "wrong," "justice" and "injustice," "allies," "enemies" and "traitors" for those in charge of imperiums (16.7.1-15). Each definition presupposes the identity of right and power, which our sixteenth "aphorism" has already shown to follow from the highest law of nature (16.2.3). The definitions serve as administrative guidelines for preserving an imperium's foundations. They are owners'-manual entries as it were, scientifically designed for the routine care and maintenance of imperiums.

Accordingly, Chapter 16's concluding discussion of the right of the highest powers aims at facilitating cooperation between imperiums and philosophers or scientists, by denying organized religion any prerogatives that might in principle interfere with that cooperation (16.8.1-24). The discussion takes the form of replies to three objections against Spinoza's gloss on Paul's statement that there is no sin before there is law, cited earlier to prooftext the account of the natural imperium (16.2.6-8): doesn't ascribing to individuals a natural right to harm others contradict the biblical command to love one's neighbor (16.8.1-9)? aren't political imperiums bound by biblical commands (16.8.10-16)? and shouldn't we disobey any imperium that disregards those commands (16.8.17-24)? Spinoza, it is objected, effectively forces organized religion to conform to the *modus operandi* of imperiums. The gist of his replies is that the natural imperium is prior to organized religion (since individuals know biblical commands only from divine revelation), that political imperiums in turn are part of the natural imperium (and so are free to defer to organized religion if and

only if it seems useful), and that the need to obey political imperiums does not stand or fall with the conscience of the individual believer (i.e., with "each's different judgment and emotion," 16.8.18). The practical upshot—that the highest powers are not to be distracted by organized religion from looking to philosophers or scientists rather than theologians for advice—we may speak of as step one of Spinoza's political argument proper.

### Step 17: The Biblical Theocracy as a Flawed Imperium

> ....why was this nation more stubborn than the others? Was it by nature? Surely nature does not create nations, but individuals, who are not divided into nations except on the basis of the diversity of language, laws, and received mores; and only on the basis of these last two—laws and mores—can it arise that each nation has a special mental cast, a special condition, and, finally, special prejudices. [17.12.29]

Step two of Spinoza's political argument consists of second-thoughts on step one. Chapter 16's account of the right of the highest powers, he warns, is "merely theoretical" (17.1.1). In practice, an imperium's sway is both less and more than what has been shown so far (17.1.2-2.1). It is less, since no individual ever abandons all his right or power to the extent of leaving nothing to his own discretion. Yet it is more, since an imperium has the power—or right—not just to enforce outward compliance, but above all to promote its subjects' inner loyalty as well as their virtue and steadfastness in complying (17.3.1). An imperium's power, in other words, is more motivational or inspirational than brachial or by force of arms. Chapter 17's frequent citations of Tacitus and Curtius to that effect recall the Preface's thumbnail sketch of the co-opting of religious beliefs by ancient imperiums (17.3.6-15, 8.9-11, 12.14, 33, with P.1.7-3.1). The bulk of Chapter 17 shows that it is both necessary and proper for imperiums to adapt religion's motivating power to their needs, by analyzing the rise and fall of the biblical theocracy (17.2.2, 4.1-13.6). Spinoza disclaims any intent to draw from his analysis a formula for a perfectly viable or indestructible imperium. He limits himself to indicating instead that, as much as it needs the cooperation of its subjects' religious passions, an imperium must avoid making laws or policy decisions on the basis of those passions. The biblical theocracy is Spinoza's textbook case of an imperium slowly collapsing from a built-in defect that resulted from its founder's having succumbed to the passions he was supposed to be regulating and restraining.

In Spinoza's analysis, the biblical theocracy was an aborted democracy. The Dodecateuch documents its founding through three successive phases—a disguised democracy (17.4.1-5.1), an enhanced monarchy (17.5.2-8), and a mixed regime with checks and balances inadvisedly tilted to favor one tribe over the others (17.5.9-12.26)—before tracing its gradual decline (17.12.27-59). Its three-phase founding amounted to a double refounding by Moses himself, its original founder (cf. 8.1.44-47). In his two refoundings, Moses tried to correct the shortcoming of his first founding, in a manner reminiscent or illustrative of the Preface's account of the infinite revisability

of political advice.

Phase one proved defective from Moses' apparently overestimating his free hand as founder.[60] After the Israelites had been liberated from the Egyptians' imperium and consequently reacquired their natural right as individuals to establish an imperium to suit themselves, and meanwhile attributed their liberation and ongoing preservation to God alone, Moses advised transferring all their right to God rather than to any mortal. God then became the exclusive holder of their imperium, i.e., held the title of king, and civil law and divine command became one and the same. Since the transfer of right was simply the Israelites' unanimously agreeing to do whatever God commanded them via a prophetic revelation, the right to consult God, to receive and interpret laws and to hold offices remained equal for each. While officially theocratic, phase one was in fact democratic. Phase two came about abruptly, however, during the Israelites' first and only direct audience with God, which so terrified them that they transferred their right to consult God and interpret his edicts to Moses, who practically speaking then held the imperium as both absolute monarch and only legitimate prophet. This combination strengthened Moses' hold on his imperium as compared to other monarchs' on theirs, inasmuch as the divine decrees were now revealed entirely and exclusively to him, not handed down extemporaneously through other prophets. Still, phase two was not to last beyond Moses' lifetime, since he exercised his right to choose a successor by splitting, subdividing and interlocking the imperium's religious and civil powers among a plurality of successors (including Aaronide priests and their fellow Levites on the one hand, and the princes of the remaining tribes on the other, 17.5.13-6.5). Phase three—unlike phase one a "very solid" imperium (17.12.15)—owed much, though in the end not enough, to Moses' legislative attention to the potentially destructive passions that needed to be checked and balanced against one another.

Moses' success was considerable (17.7.1ff.). On the one hand, he hemmed in any tyrannical urge on the part of tribal princes or other leaders by downsizing them into administrators (17.8.1-12.5, with 5.15, 22-23). For example, princes had to defer to the Levites as the sole interpreters of the laws by which they were bound, including a law preventing them from employing mercenary soldiers; tribes were allied by a common religious bond, so that any prince who broke with the alliance became a religious enemy; new prophets who met constitutional tests could overrule princes and priests alike; a prince's right to rule depended on seniority and virtue, not on birth or nobility; finally, because each tribe's military were citizen soldiers with concurrent peacetime interests, no prince could keep their allegiance simply as warlord. On the other hand, Moses forestalled unrest on the part of citizens by underwriting and safeguarding their private freedom (17.12.6-25). For example, religious worship reinforced patriotic self-esteem by reiterating regularly that the Israelites' imperium was God's kingdom and they themselves were God's children, the other nations being

[60] As for whether Moses' initial overestimate was deliberate, consider 5.2 15 Cf. also Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* I.9 (trans. Mansfield and Tarcov, 28-30).

God's enemies who deserved hatred[61] for following religiously unacceptable mores and rituals; the jubilee law made homestead property inalienable; charity toward impoverished fellow citizens was a prerequisite for God's beneficence toward the society as a whole; the religiously mandated levelling of social classes prevented civil disturbances, albeit at the price of increasing the hatred that isolated the Israelites from other nations; finally, because the prescribed education inculcated a lifelong reverence for prohibitive laws governing, e.g., farming practices, festive celebrations and cultic worship, obeying them was seen as freedom rather than servitude. Nevertheless the Israelites intermittently, and ultimately, failed to abide by those laws.

As our seventeenth "aphorism" shows, Spinoza doubts the suggestion that the cause was their natural stubbornness as a nation (17.12.27-59). He does not dismiss this suggestion out of hand, but determines its grain of truth by a twofold argument, philosophical and theological. Philosophically, he insists that stubbornness could not be any nation's natural trait, since nations as such are not natural, but—in keeping with the argument of Chapter 16—consist merely of individuals sharing the same language, laws and received mores. If so, the Israelites' stubbornness must have come from a defect in their laws and/or mores in particular. Theologically, then, he cites Jeremiah and especially Ezekiel, who says in so many words that God gave the Israelites defective laws that would end up destroying them, to let them know that he was God (Jer. 32:31, Ezek. 20:25). To pinpoint the putative defect of the Mosaic laws, Spinoza recalls Moses' undemocratically shifting authority over cultic matters from family elders to the Levites (Num. 8:17ff., Dt. 10:8)—a shift made in anger in the aftermath of the Israelites' idolatrous worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32) rather than on sober reflection. Following Moses' hasty restructuring, the laws were no longer seen as promoting the populace's self-interest—their honor, welfare and security—but as punishing their wrongdoings. Moses' moralizing proved demoralizing. The Levites' subsequent intrusiveness as tax-collectors, religious functionaries and moral censors aroused popular resentment and suspicion, to the point where the Israelites eventually abandoned the authorized ceremonies altogether, as Moses himself predicted in his farewell speech (Dt. 31:21, 27). Consolidating religious authority had already provoked rebellion during Moses' lifetime, first from a faction of nobles, whom Moses could not calm on his own but who were removed violently by a divine miracle, and then from the populace as a whole, who suspected that the miracle was an artifice of Moses' and refused to be calmed until a plague exhausted them both physically and morally (Num. 16-17). After Moses' death, the ongoing slackening of the religious bond brought generations of political instability and off-and-on foreign subjugation, until the Israelites tried to restabilize their imperium by transferring the right of kingship from God to human kings—whose inevitable rivalries with the Levites and priests, however, led to further destabilization. To circumvent the Levites, who continued to administer the cultic worship, the kings let other temples be dedicated to (other) gods; and to circumvent the priests, who retained the right to interpret the laws, they encouraged large numbers of prophets. But like the Levites *et al.*, the prophets held

[61] Limiting himself to citing Ps. 139:21-22 (at 17.12.7) and ignoring, e g., Dt. 23:7-8, Spinoza follows Mt. 5:43 (see 19 2.12).

an imperium of their own within the larger imperium, as they endorsed new pretenders to the throne whenever convenient or necessary to defend the divine authority, and thereby set in motion a revolving door of tyrannical rulers, factional tensions and civil wars. To make a long story short, the biblical imperium's fatal flaw—of which the Israelites' so-called stubbornness was only the recurring symptom—was the angry moralism of its founder. Step two of Spinoza's political argument proper is that an imperium stands or falls by being able to keep such passions under control.

### Step 18: From a Closed to an Open Society

> ...the form of such an imperium could perhaps only be useful for those who wanted to live to themselves alone, without outside commerce, and enclose themselves within their own limits and segregate themselves from the rest of the globe, and hardly for those for whom it is necessary to have commerce with others. [18.1.4]

Chapter 18's title advertises "some political dogmas" derived from the Israelites' "Republic and histories." The dogmas turn out to be four in number, although they are not listed right away and are not called by that name when they show up in due course (18.4.1-21). Spinoza introduces them simply as what "we see very clearly," following his seven-part answer to a question he raises at the outset of the Chapter, concerning whether the biblical imperium as conceived in the previous Chapter is to be imitated nowadays (18.1.1-3.9). Deriving Chapter 18's political dogmas from Chapter 17, it seems, requires a complex intervening step.

As for the dogmas themselves, Spinoza does not state them straightforwardly, in the manner of the theological dogmas of Chapter 14 (cf. 14.1.36-46). Rather, each carries some qualification. The first dogma is not just that clergy have no right to decree or transact public business, but that such a right would be "pernicious" for both religion and the republic (18.4.1). Likewise, the second dogma is that it is "dangerous" to defer to organized religion in theoretical matters and make laws favoring disputable opinions, since political authorities must then placate popular (i.e., religious) anger against anyone doubting those opinions, by coercing doubters into adhering to them (18.4.2-5). The third dogma—whose fuller discussion is postponed till Chapter 19—is that it is "necessary" to grant the highest powers the right to decide what is sacred and sacrilegious (18.4.6-7). The last dogma is that it is "fatal" for populaces of imperiums who are unused to kings to choose kings and, in general, for any imperium's form to be changed even to remove a tyrant, as may be seen in particular from the the recent examples of Cromwell's failure to replace the monarchy in England and the Count of Leicester's to replace the aristocracy in Holland, as well as from the ancient example of the populace of early Rome, who replaced their short line of tyrannical kings rather easily but ended up with a long line of *de facto* tyrants until kings were eventually restored under a new name (Caesars) (18.4.8-21). Spinoza's way of stating these dogmas calls attention to their being political not only in subject-matter but also in intent. In spelling out philosophically or scientifically what is

"pernicious," "dangerous," "necessary" and "fatal" for imperiums, he speaks as an adviser to holders and would-be holders of imperiums. That his advice is meant above all for holders of democratic imperiums—i.e., citizens of democracies, whether actual or potential—is clear from the seven-part discussion preceding the dogmas themselves.

The discussion, Spinoza's complex answer to the question of whether the biblical imperium is imitable, matches the wording of the Chapter's title, in comprising four sub-answers based on the biblical "Republic" and three sub-answers based on the biblical "histories" (18.1.2-8, 1.10-3.9). The first two sub-answers are that full imitation of the biblical republic is out of the question, on theological and political grounds respectively. Theologically, reinstituting a theocracy would require a new compact between those transferring their right to God and God himself, who has since revealed to the Apostles that he no longer writes compacts in ink or on stone, as he did with the ancient Israelites, but only with his spirit on the human heart (II Cor. 3:3). Politically—as our eighteenth "aphorism" remarks—adopting the form or institutional structure of a theocracy might be useful for a closed society, separated from the rest of the world, but hardly for an open society, dependent on commerce or interchange with the world. A theocracy, in other words, is both theologically impossible for Christians and politically inappropriate for all but, say, ghettoized Jews. Yet Spinoza's next two sub-answers allow that open societies may well imitate the biblical theocracy in part, by institutionalizing the distinction between political and religious authority. For one thing, in giving Moses "the highest right to command," the biblical theocracy placed religious authorities under his overall jurisdiction rather than vice versa. At the same time, it circumscribed those authorities by not letting them judge citizens or excommunicate anyone, but reserving these powers to the strictly political authorites. We note that if these last two features of the biblical theocracy—subordinating the religious to the political and denying political authority to purely religious decrees—are in some sense already part of Christian imperiums nowadays by virtue of being part of their biblical heritage, then political dogma number four, cautioning against changing an imperium's form, may nevertheless allow for scaling back any undue political authority claimed by organized religion.

This last implication is confirmed by a glance at Spinoza's three remaining sub-answers, concerning what is noteworthy in the biblical histories. They show, respectively, the political incompetence of the three non-democratic ruling elements—priests, prophets, kings—when each was allowed to assert itself without restraint. The priests' takeover of political rule during the restored theocracy under the Persian imperium led to the introduction of religious sectarianism, as they embellished their usurpation of the princes' right and curried favor with a corrupt plebs by prooftexting the biblical law at their own discretion in noticeably unprecedented and controversial ways (18.1.10-15, with 17.13.3-4). Prophets, as merely private individuals, were ineffective and often intolerable in exercising their freedom to warn and chastise the populace—in contrast to the kings, who did so effectively (18.2.1-2). The kings, however, multiplied and exacerbated the civil wars that continued to weaken the imperium until its collapse, whereas such wars had occurred only once during the

populace's rule and ended with the victorious Israelites' paying full reparations to the defeated Judeans; also, during the kings' rule the laws were corrupted, false as well as true prophets abounded, and the kings themselves remained morally incorrigible, whereas during the populace's rule the people were able to turn to God and restore the laws when necessary to save themselves from political calamities (18.3.1-9). By the Bible's own standards, then, all non-democratic candidates for running the imperium proved unsuccessful, both singly and in combination. Construing biblical politics in terms of an imperium has turned out to favor democracy over all other imperiums, just as construing biblical theology in terms of a collection of tenets (or sentences) turned out to favor devotion to justice and charity over all other elements of religious worship. On Spinoza's reading, the more attention we pay to the biblical imperium then and there, the less deference we owe it here and now. If—recalling "aphorism" eighteen—the most useful imperium today is one designed to govern an open rather than a closed society and if biblical religion is more useful the more it can serve such an imperium, then whatever else might be meant by, say, a Christian imperium (or a Jewish one, as adumbrated at 3.5.67), it follows that, to be useful, modern Christianity (or Judaism) is well-advised to reorient itself with a view to motivating and inspiring within its circumscribed limits any liberalizing and democratizing tendencies already present in that imperium. Such has been the *Treatise*'s own political undercurrent all along. Now that this current has come closer to the surface in the rationale for Chapter 18's political dogmas, we may speak of it as step three of Spinoza's political argument proper.

### Step 19: Christianity's Mission Within Political Imperiums

> ...Religion among the Hebrews received the force of right solely from the right of the imperium; and this being destroyed, it could no longer be considered as the bidding of a special imperium, but the catholic lesson of reason. Of reason, I say. For the Catholic Religion had not yet become known by revelation. [19.1.16]

According to its title, the argument of Chapter 19 is twofold—political and theological. Politically, Spinoza argues, the highest powers have complete jurisdiction over organized religion (19.1.1-22). Theologically, then, all "outward worship" must be adapted to "the peace of the Republic" as determined by the highest powers (19.2.1-33). Spinoza acknowledges that this joint theologico-political argument is apt to stir controversy, by seasoning it with polemical remarks and supplementing it with an explanation of why the controversy is peculiar to Christian imperiums (19.1.1-2, 2.16-17, 22-23, 29-30, 3.1-17). The argument is meant to stand on its own, however, given the results of the previous Chapters. Its political component is a reworking of those results so as to support its theological component "easily" (19.1.22; cf. 19.1.6). In turn, its theological component further refines the *Treatise*'s recipe for serving God and the imperium at the same time.

For the argument's political component, Spinoza retrieves premises sketched in

four earlier Chapters (19.1.3, 4-6, 7-8, 9) and summons biblical precedents glossed on three prior occasions (19.1.10, 11, 12-15). Chapter 7's distinction between inward and outward worship suggests that religious piety has an inalienable source within each individual's mind, separate from any overt behavior and so not subject to political regulation. Chapter 14's identification of piety with devotion to justice and charity implies that God's kingdom is wherever just and charitable behavior has the backing of a political imperium. Chapter 16's description of humans' natural state as one where reason and appetite have equal right means that prior to founding an imperium there is neither sin nor divine judgment, hence no place for justice or charity. Finally, Chapter 4's denial that God may be understood as a lawgiver warrants the inference that just and charitable behavior is possible only through the decrees of those who hold imperiums. Yet there is more. While the foregoing premises are enough to certify the highest powers' jurisdiction over religious behavior for a religion "revealed by the natural light," i.e., based simply on the idea of God as it occurs naturally in the human mind, Spinoza adds that the same conclusion follows for a religion "revealed . . . by the prophetic light," i.e., based on the biblical text (19.1.10). Thus, God's rule over the Israelites began only with the compact by which each Israelite agreed to yield his natural right and obey whatever God revealed prophetically, and which resulted in practice in a democratic imperium until the Israelites abruptly transferred their right to Moses and God henceforth ruled exclusively though him (cf. 17.4.1-5.9). Before that compact, Moses could not so much as enforce, e.g., sabbath observance, whereas he could afterward (cf. 5.3.1-9). Nor did divine rule last beyond the collapse of the Israelites' imperium and the transfer of their right to the king of Babylonia, as Jeremiah 29:7 attests in warning them for their own safety to submit peacefully to the laws of their new imperium even though these differed from the laws they were used to (cf. 16.8.21).

While summarizing and reformulating the political component of his argument to clarify it further (19.1.18-20), Spinoza connects the persistence of the Israelites' religion after the collapse of their imperium with the foregoing distinction between natural and prophetic religion. The distinction, as it turns out, permeates Chapter 19 (cf. 19.1.5, 10, 16-20, 2.33, 3.17). In the words of our nineteenth "aphorism," the Israelites' religion persisted as "the catholic lesson of reason." Spinoza leaves us to infer exactly what this means. What persisted was not, he hastens to add, the same as the Catholic religion, which had not yet been revealed. Nor, of course, was it the same as the biblical law as such. We seem invited to probe more. Chapter 19 speaks repeatedly, with reference to Chapter 16, of "the lessons of true reason," and synonymously, with reference to Chapter 4, of "the divine lessons" (19.1.9-10, 20). For its part, Chapter 16 makes no mention of "lessons," but connects what our Chapter calls "the dictate of reason" specifically with the pre-political decision to yield one's natural right and submit to a political imperium—which our Chapter connects as well with the Israelites' imperium in particular (16.2.7, 4.2, 5.1, 4, 6.6, 8.11; 19.1.10). Yet Chapter 4 identifies "the opinions and lessons [*sic*] universal to the human race, that is, . . . opinions that are common and true," with the teaching of Christ rather than with "the opinions of the Jews" (4.4.26). These scattered references,

we gather, add up to Spinoza's accounting for the persistence of the Israelites' religion insofar as it embodied true and universal opinions that are found to some extent in all religions, though they are spelled out more fully in Christianity. Despite Spinoza's initial disclaimer that the opinions in question are not identical with the Christian religion per se, or perhaps in agreement with the disclaimer, they do bear some resemblance to the seven dogmas of the "catholic or universal faith" of Chapter 14.[62] We are led to expect Spinoza to pick up this loose thread in the theological component of the argument of Chapter 19, especially given the latter's pointed references to Christ and Christian imperiums—the *Treatise*'s last (19.2.12-15, 20, 25-26, 28-30).

For the theological component of the argument, Spinoza supplies three sub-arguments—philosophical, political, religious (cf. 19.2.33)—for why organized religion remains entirely subject to the decrees of the highest powers, who are therefore its proper interpreters and defenders. The sub-arguments, when freed of their polemical trappings, are as follows. Philosophically, obeying God's command to venerate our neighbor by behaving justly and charitably toward him requires first and foremost our obedience to the imperium's decrees, lest we weaken the rule of law, the sole support for just and charitable behavior (19.2.1-20). Politically, then, denying the highest powers' authority over preachers *et al.* is tantamount to weakening the rule of law by introducing competing moral authorities (19.2.21-26). Finally, organized religion is enhanced when the justice and charitableness it teaches are backed by the rule of law (19.2.27-32). Yet each sub-argument also appeals to at least one theological precedent. The first sub-argument in particular contains the *Treatise*'s last references to Christ. Here the political occasion for Christ's teaching is compared to the political occasion for the aforementioned teaching of Jeremiah's. Both Christ and Jeremiah lived in imperiums undergoing collapse. They differed in that whereas Jeremiah foresaw the need for the Israelites to extend their pious devotion to justice and charitableness to their new rulers, the Babylonians, Christ foresaw the need to extend it further, to "absolutely everyone," since the Israelites were going to be dispersed to imperiums throughout the globe (19.2.12). Even so, Christ did not differ from Jeremiah in teaching that religion is to be accommodated to the imperium.[63] Their common teaching, taken by itself, is another way of describing what Chapter 19 means by "the catholic lesson of reason," what Chapter 16 means by reason's role in the founding of imperiums, and what Chapter 4 means by "the mind of Christ" in contradistinction to the universal and common moral opinions that show up in Christ's teaching as spelled out in the New Testament (cf. 4.4.24-30). Generally, if piety means the

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[62] Unlike "the lessons of true reason," a.k.a "the divine lessons," the seven dogmas are exempt from being true, though not from being conducive to "true virtue," i.e., to equity and goodness (cf. 14.1.4, 34-36, 42, with 14 1.1, 6, 9, 22, 32, 39, 48-49, 2 1).

[63] Ch 19's remaining references to Christ face the immediate objection that Christ's own disciples are an exception to the rule that religion has always been accommodated to the imperium, since they preached simply as "private men" (19.2 13-15). Spinoza's answer is that the disciples were exempt from the general rule because Christ gave them the power to contend with "impure Spirits," along with or including the advice not to fear those who kill bodies (Mt. 10:1, 28). He adds that Christ's miraculous empowerment was given only to the disciples, not to anyone else, and does not otherwise override Solomon's advice to fear both God and the king (Prov. 24:21).

pre-political or infra-political disposition to justice and charitableness, then we may speak with Spinoza of natural piety as the rational insight into lawfulness and its desirability for human life, of which there is some glimmer in each individual prior to and independent of his entry into an imperium. When that natural piety is combined with a closed imperium like the biblical one, it results in what Spinoza has called "defending the jurisdictions of the Republic" (5.1.14), whether Israelite or Babylonian, say, but in any case the jurisdictions of a particular imperium to which exclusive loyalty is owed by anyone who enters it. When, on the other hand, the same natural piety is combined with an imperium whose inhabitants are subject to global dispersion as in Christ's time and beyond—or, for that matter, with a cosmopolitan commercial imperium like Spinoza's Amsterdam—it results in the "dogmas of the universal faith" (14.1.38), i.e., in moral lessons that are compatible in principle with any imperium.

Chapter 19 concludes by showing why controversy over religion's subservience to the imperium is a distinctively Christian phenomenon (19.3.1-5). Because Christianity's first teachers were simply "private men" who took no account of political life, and because its teaching did not change when it was later introduced into the (Roman) imperium and taught to the emperors, churchmen themselves rather than the emperors became its acknowledged teachers, interpreters, pastors, and quasi-representatives of God. Churchmen then sought to preserve their prerogatives against possible encroachment by Christian kings, by prohibiting marriage for the church's chief functionaries and highest theologian, and by multiplying its dogmas and mixing them with philosophical theories so that only those with the leisure to dabble in philosophy could interpret its teaching authoritatively. The eventual result was the ongoing conflict between church and imperium, to which Spinoza has referred polemically during the theological component of his argument (19.2.24-26, 28). Comparing the church with the biblical priesthood further exposes the factional politics that are, accordingly, part and parcel of post-biblical theology. The claim that priests *et al.* were politically autonomous never arose in the biblical imperium—neither before there were kings, when tribal princes had the right to decree concerning sacred matters and priests were not the sole religious teachers, nor afterward, when kings organized and supervised the priests and Levites, as Spinoza documents during the remainder of the Chapter (19.3.6-17). From an intra-Christian point of view, one might say that Spinoza means to awaken Christians to proper public-spiritedness by recalling their Old Testament heritage. But while he writes for Christians, he is in the end not of them.[64] His deeper premise is the natural piety, or commonplace appreciation of the need for law-abidingness among human beings, on which the argument of Chapter 19 as such rests. We may speak of this non-sectarian premise as step four of Spinoza's political argument proper.

**Step 20: Home Free**

...Take, for example, the city of Amsterdam, which, to its considerable

[64] Cf Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill : Free Press, 1952), 190ff

> enhancement and with the admiration of all nations, experiences the fruits of [religious and political] freedom. For in this most flourishing Republic and most outstanding city, all human beings of whatever nation and sect live with the greatest harmony; and for them to trust their goods to someone, they care to know only whether he is rich or poor and whether he is used to acting in good faith or by a ruse. Otherwise Religion or sect does not move them at all, since it does not help at all in winning or losing a cause before a judge; and no sect is so altogether hateful whose devotees (so long as they harm no one and pay each what is owed and live honorably) are not protected by the public authority and enforcement of the magistrates...[20.6.4]

Chapter 20 comes with a handy six-point summary (20.7.1-6). Spinoza draws from it the *Treatise*'s overall practical conclusion (20.7.7). The conclusion is that allowing freedom of thought and self-expression does not prevent the highest powers from guaranteeing their republic's safety or stability as much as can be done. There are two provisos, however. First, organized religion's be-all and end-all is charitable and equitable behavior. Second, the highest powers' jurisdiction over both organized religion and everything else is confined to regulating outward behavior. These provisos are compressed restatements of the *Treatise*'s overall theological and political proposals, taken separately. Spinoza's underlying premise here, as throughout, is that political society remains in need of biblical religion or some reasonable facsimile of it. Since we have been wondering all along how this premise fits with the way of life exemplified in the description of his native Amsterdam—our last "aphorism"—I limit my final comments to indicating how Chapter 20 faces, or perhaps fails to face, this question.

The Chapter's built-in summary relies on the distinction between natural and prophetic religion bequeathed by Chapter 19, though for some reason Spinoza makes it hard to tell. The summary lists six tenets[65] more or less in the order in which he has argued for them:

1. No one can keep human beings from thinking and saying what they like (20.1.1-3.2).

2. Freedom of thought and self-expression does not undermine political society, so long as individuals remain outwardly law-abiding no matter what they think or say (20.3.3-4.11).

3. Such freedom is compatible with political stability, and any disadvantages resulting from it are easily controlled (20.4.12-19a).

4. Such freedom does not harm religious piety (cf. 20.4.13b-15).

5. Censoring philosophy or science is useless (20.4.19b-5.11).

[65] Cf. 20.4 7, 13b, with 8.2.

6. The foregoing proposals are not only feasible, but needed for political stability (20.6.1-4).

The exception is tenet four—that freedom of thought and self-expression does not harm religious piety. It is not argued for as such. Spinoza only appeals to it in passing during his argument for tenet three—that freedom of thought and self-expression is compatible with political stability, etc. Attentive readers must wonder how it makes the list. It does not seem to do much more than sit between tenets three and five—that censoring philosophy or science is useless. If so, its function must be largely rhetorical (cf. 1.1.3). Consider how tenet four enters Chapter 20 inside Spinoza's larger assertion, in support of tenet three, that good citizenship like religious piety is knowable only through charitable behavior:

> For if ... we paid attention as well to the fact that each's faith toward the Republic, like that toward God, can be recognized solely by works—namely, on the basis of his charity toward his neighbor—we will never be able to doubt that the best republic grants the same freedom of philosophizing to each which we have shown faith grants to each. [20.4.15, underlining added]

Rather than arguing for tenet four here, Spinoza merely inserts an abbreviated version of Chapter 18's description of religious piety, in keeping with his promise there to speak of it "more broadly" later on (18.4.5). Accordingly, he also retains the practical warning attached to that description and addressed to holders of Christian (and Jewish) imperiums, to the effect that bowing to organized religion in theoretical matters is dangerous, etc. (see 18.4.2-5). As in Chapter 18, so in the present context, Spinoza's premise that religious piety shows up only as charitable behavior serves to hallow his conclusion that "the freedom of philosophizing" must be permitted, or more exactly, as tenet five puts it, that laws censoring philosophy or science are useless. In short, tenet four's function is to smooth the reader's transition from tenet three to tenet five, by encouraging the view that the freedom common to public outspokenness and private philosophizing, when both are exercised in an outwardly law-abiding manner, has the imprimatur of religious piety. Meanwhile, saying nothing in support of tenet four frees Spinoza from having to spell out whether the piety to which Chapter 20 ultimately appeals is the natural piety of Chapter 19 rather than the prophetic piety of, say, Chapter 1. It is either or both, though since these may not be at bottom not quite compatible, the implications of his silence here are theologically unsettling, as our final look at Spinoza's Amsterdam will confirm.

Consider, in this regard, that Spinoza may well have failed to offer an argument for tenet four—that freedom of thought and self-expression does not harm religious piety—because it is, in the last analysis, indemonstrable. Again, have we not been perplexed from the outset over how religious piety is supposed to function in Spinoza's Amsterdam, the *Treatise*'s philosophical home-base and practical test-case? If the seven dogmas of Chapter 14's catholic or universal faith are meant to fit smoothly

with Amsterdam's marketplace, we began by asking, aren't they subject as well to the ruses of the marketplace and, to that extent, ineffective? According to what we have since discovered in the *Treatise*'s political argument, Spinoza's answer seems to be that religion's usefulness is no more and no less than its rhetorical effectiveness in promoting law-abidingness. Naturally, this differs from imperium to imperium. What promotes law-abidingness in pre-exilic Jerusalem, for example, may not in the Babylon about which Jeremiah speaks or in the Israelites' second imperium around the time of Christ, let alone in modern Amsterdam. The *Treatise* as a whole alerts its philosophical reader to the appropriate theologico-political consequences. Theologically, Amsterdam's religious heritage includes the globally applicable moral maxims of the Gospels, although these are all too often forgotten during quasi-philosophical controversies and sectarian religious persecutions. On the other hand, Amsterdam as a free republic would seem to allow and even require a public airing of issues affecting the stability of its imperium—including the place of Christianity itself, especially given the latter's shaky political track-record. Philosophically, then, the *Treatise* aims to remove the politically destabilizing traces of old-fashioned (Platonic-Aristotelian) philosophy from post-biblical theology, by constructing what amounts to a twenty-step alternative suitable for use in open societies like Amsterdam. Even so, there is a leftover difficulty having to do with the fact that the *Treatise* resembles a construction project rather than an observation site, however encumbered the latter would have to be by its admittedly cluttered theologico-political setting. That is, Spinoza prefers to assure us that his philosophical constructs are safe and useful as they stand, rather than that he has fully faced the discernible consequences of neglecting the salutary lessons of the biblical heritage which his constructs would have us overlook or obscure—e.g., that, contrary to the example of the morally obtuse business executive which we gave earlier, it is not permissible to arrive at rhetorically defensible ends by morally unconscionable means (cf. II Sam. 11, I Ki. 21, with Ex. 23:2). The *Treatise*'s failure to supply an argument that would bring into view this larger tension between "the freedom of philosophizing" and biblical piety, or in other words the rhetorical priority Chapter 20 attaches to blurring rather than clarifying this tension, is the final step of Spinoza's political argument.

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# *INDEXES*

As I mention in my Translator's Remarks, Spinoza's Latin is characterized by paragraphs and sentences of often considerable length. To ease the burden on the English reader and to facilitate references to Spinoza's text, I have numbered each Latin paragraph, as well as each Latin sentence within that paragraph. I have then treated each numbered sentence as a separate paragraph and punctuated Spinoza's Latin half-stops as English full-stops. As a result, the third Latin sentence of the second paragraph of Spinoza's first chapter, say, is 1.2.3. An "A" instead of a Chapter-number in the citation refers to Spinoza's Annotations; a "P" to the Preface; a "T" to a Chapter-title; and "TP" to the Title Page. To help the reader's eye while scanning the Indexes, I have placed all Chapter-numbers (and the aforementioned letters) in boldface.

## INDEX OF CITATIONS

*Note*: Only sources that Spinoza cites explicitly in the *Treatise* are indexed here. Sources that he cites implicitly are often acknowledged in the translator's footnotes.[1]

### BIBLICAL (OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT)



[1] In citing Spinoza's implicit sources, my footnotes make no claim to completeness. A further list of sources and parallel passages may be found, e.g., in Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965; reprint; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 311-27.

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*Note*: For names marked with an asterisk (*), see also Index of Citations.

# INDEX OF TERMS

*Note:* An italicized reference (usually the third component of the three-part reference number) indicates a passage italicized in Spinoza's text (where he himself is quoting it, whether in Latin translation from some biblical, classical or rabbinic source, or, where applicable, in the Latin original). Instances of proper names, or of terms used as parts of book-titles or of books, are in general not included; for these, *see* the Index of Citations or the Index of Names.

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*–Paul J. Bagley, President*
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